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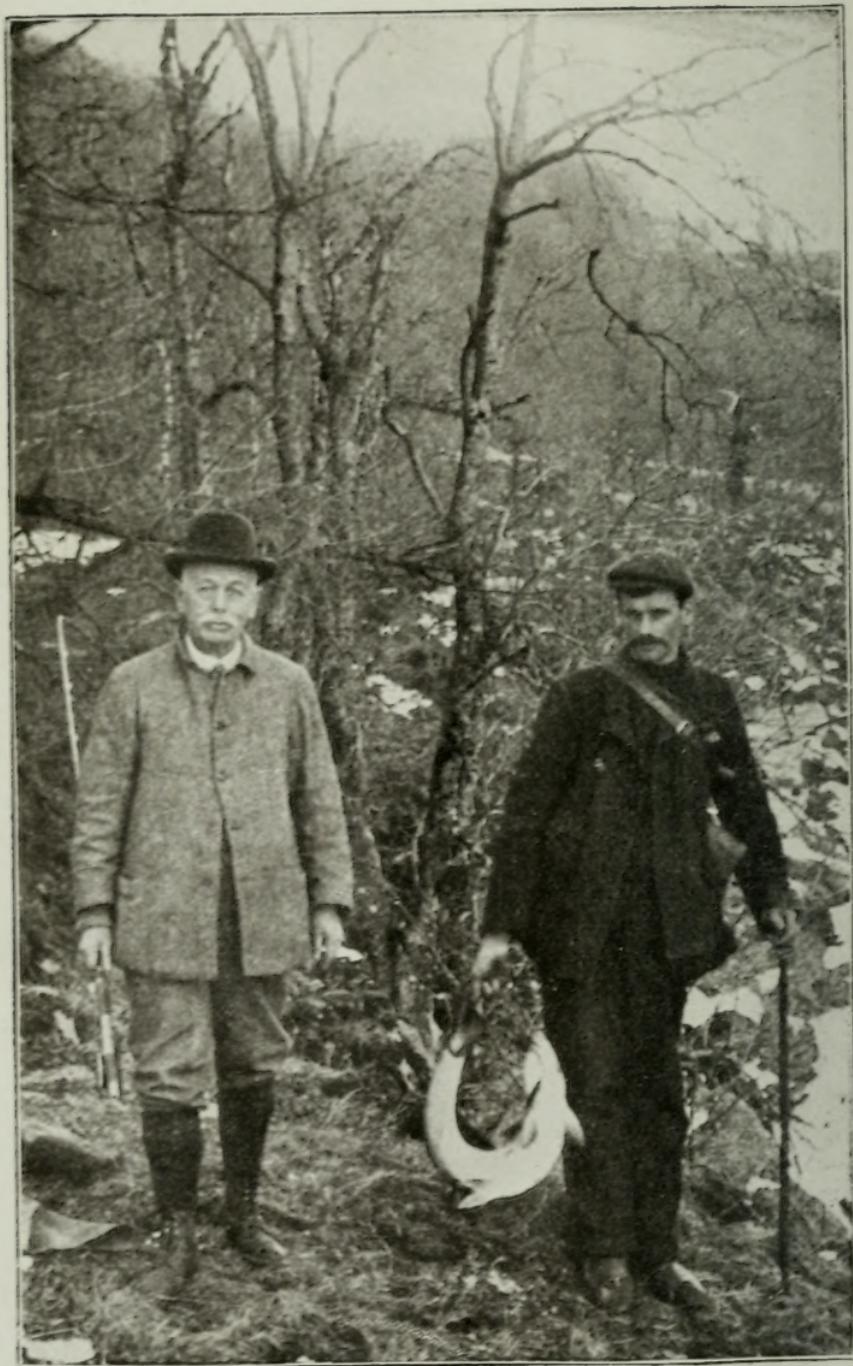


Photo by A. G. Campbell.

D.S.

My Sailor Gillie, John.

Chap. 15.

DAYS
STOLEN FOR SPORT

PHILIP GEEN



LONDON & GLASGOW
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Days Stolen for Sport

CHAPTER I

One clear idea, wakened in the breast
By memory's magic lets in all the rest.

TREATS MY FATHER PAID FOR—I GET A FRIGHT— SPORTING PARSONS—I LOSE MY PHOTOGRAPHER

ALTHOUGH I am old in years—threescore and seven—I can walk the longest day and shoot as straight as I ever could, thanks not so much perhaps to the stiffening of my loins by birchings as to the reason for their infliction. Stealing days has ever been a joy to me, and I often played truant from school. I had no compunctions at the time and have had no regrets as yet, for what I learned in the fields and woods has been a source of life-long pleasure.

My upbringing was so full of the joys of outdoor life that my delight has always been in the open air and sunshine. School was to me a prison, and its teachings nauseous drugs which I avoided with all the cunning of my little brains; yet I listened by ~~the~~ hour, with wide-open eyes, to the ugliest man boy ever saw while he taught me to be familiar with living things. I have had kindly thoughts of Pavey a thousand times as the picture of his giant form and ugly face, redeemed by a kindly twinkling eye, has recurred to memory; but of the men who worked so hard, sometimes with a birch, to teach me to read, write, and sum, I cannot recall a single face.

‘Snuffy’—Mr Stevens—a born teacher, so it was

thought, who often made a mark that was intended to keep my memory green, has faded until all that is left of him, beyond his name, is the preparatory working of his arm to give it greater freedom and his creaky voice saying, 'Your father pays for this—and this. Now miche from school again.'

I had a friend—a bold bad boy—who took the treats his father paid for like a man, and he had a sister who looked at us with wondrous pitying eyes, thereby perhaps but making us the bolder. Her face was the prettiest I had ever seen and grew in beauty with my knowledge of her; now, memories of its owner's worth are mirrors in which the face is perfect.

To stuff young children's brains with answers to questions they have not asked is the surest way to choke their innate desire for knowledge. The growth of their imaginations should have the freest scope and only be guided by helpful answers until they have sorted and given a place to the many wondrous things they have to see. My father, who loved children, horses, dogs, and foxes, never tired of my questionings, and lived to be eighty-five to answer them, so I learned from him about the birds that come to herald in the seasons, and that the world is round and has a variety of climates: that those parts marked red upon the map belong to England, and that the best parts of the earth will always belong to those who can take and hold them: that every animal, including fish and birds, has to fight to hold its own because Envy stalks in every shape thirsting to be possessed of what belongs to others: that the trout we tried to catch so often had to fight to remain behind the stone which enabled it to feed so comfortably, and that even the cow which has the head position fought for it and must be prepared to fight all comers or down she goes. The proudest strutter in the yard walks like that because

the bird has not, as yet, appeared that can make him walk meekly with the meekest of the hens.

I was full of this need to be a fighter when Pavey gave me my first rod.

'Do you think, Pavey, I shall have to fight to keep it?' I asked.

He looked much surprised and said, 'I hope not, my boy, I hope not,' in such a sad voice that I tried to comfort him by asking, 'Have you ever had to fight, Pavey?'

'Only once, my boy, since I left school, and then I got an unlucky kick, and that's how I lost my eye.'

Pavey was my earliest tutor for fishing, and much besides, and a better teacher it would be hard to find. It will be a pleasure for me to tell of him, for I owe him more than I can say. Who shall measure the happiness of such a memory as is mine of him, kept fresh and helpful for nearly threescore years? 'Sweep, Sweep.' Hear that sound where I may and I stand again in Pavey's shed listening to his tales while he is making my rod. He knew the note of every bird and could imitate them so well as to deceive the birds themselves. The haunts and ways of animals were quite familiar to him, and I think he liked to let me learn and share his joys; and I did so until I, too, became alert to every sound and got some knowledge of its meaning, and thus became a lover of the funny ways of living things. We have not sat outside rabbit holes making noises like turnips to draw their inmates out, as Mark Twain advised an inquirer to do, but I have lain by Pavey's side and heard him imitate the squeal a rabbit makes when the stoat has got it, and watched the stoat come from out the hiding-place to which we had seen him run. When in business attire he was the longest length of animated soot between Porlock and Penzance, and, what is more, he could be warranted not to change much in hue by

the severest scrubbing. So swarthy was the natural skin beneath its borrowed coat that even in his sweetest moments, when freed from soot, there was no relief to his long length of blackness, until you saw, high up, his huge red lips and glittering teeth which loudly called attention to the, outwardly, ugliest man I have ever seen. How ugly he was may be gathered from the fact that I once mistook him for the devil.

I was playing truant from school with Stanbury, and we were bird's-nesting. I, being the younger, had to carry the spoils which were gathered in a firm mud-lined nest. This did not prevent my bending down so as to get a look skywards through the bushes, the more readily to detect a nest. While I was so employed a terrible eye looked down on me from a black and terrible face, and, close to it, the half-closed tenantless socket of another eye. Before this apparition my legs gave way, and I was on my knees and, with outstretched hands, prepared to say, 'Oh, please, Mr Satan, I won't do it any more'; but my mouth was so wide open that I could not move it, and I was fast turning into stone when the big, red-lipped mouth opened, and the devil said, 'Why, little Phillie, doan't be frightened; it's only Pavey.' I don't know how I got there, but I found myself nestling close to Pavey, who was patting me on the head, while my chest was almost bursting by the violent efforts of my lungs to get back their equilibrium.

I made my first acquaintance with Pavey while hanging to Mary's skirt. Mother's spring-clean was in progress and all the furniture was covered up, for the chimney-sweep was coming. 'The girtest and blackest man in all the world, but he wouldn't hurt 'ee, cheel,' was Mary's opinion of the expected man. So, peeping out from behind a fold of Mary's gown, I was introduced. 'This be Phillie, Pavey. He wants to zee 'ee go up the chimbley.'

What a wondrous gift is that which enables a child to so quickly gather from voice and eyes the assurance of protection ! This man had but one eye, remember, but the sparkle of it, coupled with the music of his kindly talk, blotted out his lengthy form and sooty face, and I was soon quite close to him watching all his movements. Mary was not a bit afraid either, although her golden, frizzy head only reached a little above his elbow, and, from the way they laughed and talked between his unhurried efforts to gather up the soot, she even liked him.

Dick Gibbs, the stableman, was ever after Mary, and it was he who disturbed the talk by bustling in and saying, 'The missus be a-calling 'ee, Mary.' Instead of hurrying off she turned towards Gibbs and said, 'Now why doan't 'ee make yer quarrels up and shake hands ?' Pavey held his out but it was not accepted. Gibbs said sullenly, 'I be washed to drive the maaster into town. Will 'ee go, Phillie?' I loved driving with my father to town, as that meant sweets, and sometimes tops and marbles; but I refused to go. Gibbs seemed to divine my reason, for he replied, 'I'd bide wi' 'un altogether if I be you and Mary.' 'What's put 'ee out so, lad; baint 'ee well?' was Pavey's kindly question. But Mary spoilt its purpose with the remark, 'I year he've overwashed hisself and zwallowed the zoap.'

This proved too much for the man's quick temper, and he retorted, 'Better be overwashed and zwallow the zoap than be a dirty tooad like some folks that stinks o' zoot.'

I often saw Pavey after that, but I did not know his purpose in coming our way in such fine clothes until I heard Gibbs say to Mary :—

'I'll go for a soldier or drown myself if you marry that dirty sweep. But I'll kill that blackamoor vust, that I will.'

'Ess sure you will' said Mary, 'but do it vitty,

'doan't be bungling at sich a job. Go 'list and be a soger, larn the business, and come back and kill un properly.'

These awful threats did not keep the sweep away; indeed, if he heard of them, they multiplied his visits until the day he married our dairymaid and took her home to his pretty little cottage that was filled with furniture he had made himself. There was a stable for his pony and a lean-to shed where he kept his bench, under which were numerous drawers filled with all kinds of little tools, while, hanging on the wall above it, there was a row of larger ones, including a huge cross-cut saw. He had no end of things boys like to know about: lop-eared rabbits, pigeons, fishing-rods, a gun, and a bundle of hair from our colt's tail. 'Worth a Jew's eye, Phillie, that be. I'll make 'ee a line or two and we'll go vishing.'

He had ferrets old and young, and ferrets with torn faces that would stand up to the fiercest rat. Pavey's ferrets were more widely known and more respected than rat-catcher Cann's. They would clear the ricks of vermin faster than our curate, who never missed being present when our ricks were ferreted, could smite, though he on such occasions was a Saul indeed.

Nearly all the parsons of my youth were fond of sport. Most of them had happy, smiling faces, and their daily talk was a pleasant mixture of sport and agriculture with perhaps a slight suspicion of a bit of gossip. Parson Jack—the Reverend John Russell—was seldom missing from the Exmoor Meet, and Parson Radford who had the heaviest fist in all the county—so those who knew declared—loved a run with his beagles before, or between, the services on Sunday. His handicapping at Sunday School Sports would cause envy in our Jockey Club and I had to admire, although it robbed me of my chances, his ingenuity when he made me run a race with one

foot unshod and refused to listen to my generous offer to run with both feet bootless.

Mine was a happy boyhood, but by far the greatest happiness came to me—as it comes to most—in the harvest time of the married state. Let the children come, rejoice and be thankful, and pity those to whom they have been denied. Just half a score, enough, but not too many, were given to me.

Seven sons and dad could play at almost any game; a little addition and we were a side for cricket; but my sons had sisters and my sons' friends had sisters too, and the flocks got mixed, and now my sons and daughters are some one else's and some one else's sons and daughters mine.

W. K., my photographer, who has been so full of tricks when on the road or by the river that I have slaved with his impedimenta up hills and down dales until he found a scene that pleased him, was the last to go. Listen to him :—

‘Dad, we think we should like to go to Devon for our honeymoon, to some quiet place where we can get a little fishing. Bertha thinks she will be fond of fishing.’

Wise Bertha. Where shall I suggest their going? Pictures of scenes tumble out in quick succession and fade away as quickly, leaving one that has a face in every path and by every pool.

A caressing hand reminded me the lad was waiting, and, as I could not trust myself to tell him then, I asked for time, saying, ‘There is a week yet before the wedding.’

When he had left me I thought to write him a brief account of where to go, how to get there, the tackle necessary, and where to find the pools, but I lost myself in memories and wrote much more than I intended.

CHAPTER II

Who so in thought enjoys his former life
Thus lives twice over.

THE CONFIDENCE OF YOUTH PREVAILS—‘THE HUNTER’S INN’—FISHING FOR TROUT AND HUNTING FOR FAIRIES.

NONE but those who have in their youth attempted to propitiate bristling elderly opponents to a step not fully justified can possibly imagine the artfulness needed to come through victorious. My father who, I knew, prided himself on having carried off the prettiest girl of a certain Devon parish before he was twenty-one almost refused to help me when I asked for aid to do as he had done. I reasoned with him almost in vain although I used the most conclusive arguments: ‘You married mother when you were but little older than I am, and would do just the same again in spite of the nine plagues she has brought to bless your house. You aided, and abetted too, my brothers and sisters in their love affairs, and enjoyed it, but you desert your Benjamin in his greatest need while I thought you would revel in it for him.’

‘My dear boy, your brothers were older than you are. Please do not think of marrying for another year or two. Why, were you to suggest it up at Telsom, Nell would laugh, her mother have fits, and the father would be here as fast as his horse’s legs could bring him to tell me of the joke.’

‘But, dad, you really like Nell, don’t you?’

‘I esteem her highly, but that’s not the point just now.’

‘“Esteem,” that’s not much. Do you mean to say you don’t love her?’

'Well, lad, I do, and so does everybody, but be patient, for, say, another year.'

'That's just it; everybody loves her, and I cannot wait, so I am off. Wish me luck, dad.'

'You will need it, my boy, when you meet the mother. If I were you I should take the flanking positions first and leave that citadel until last. I can hear her guns going off at your first approach. Don't reply too soon, keep your powder for the good dame until she has spent all hers. That is to say if you get as far as the mother.'

I met Nell's father in the fields. His smile of welcome as he held out his hand gave him no chance of after resistance, and, though his eyes opened to their fullest, he was kind, patted my shoulder, and referred me to her mother.

Nell's determination not to marry until she was twenty-one was very fixed, so when I found her I was most careful with the fringe of the subject I had at heart, which was to marry before the month was out. In spite of this she was so much astonished that she could not laugh as had been predicted, and, before she had quite recovered, I commenced a tale of the certainty of my success that was a masterpiece of argument and left no room for doubt. I doubted no word of it myself, so we were both convinced.

Fortified with this valuable recruit and my father's wise advice I lost some dread of the dear, good lady, who was only a little fuller of worldly wisdom and proverbs to meet every event in life than most mothers. She was always the most upright-sitting lady I had ever seen, and, on this occasion, she sat so stiff that there was only the slightest movement of her head as she said, 'Well, Philip! Are you enjoying your holiday, my boy?'

'Boy' shook my courage, and it was somewhat falteringly that I replied: 'Nell and I have been thinking and—and talking of being married.'

It took her breath and tilted her head much beyond the perpendicular, but she recovered, and talked and talked, while I listened with a deference dad would have been proud of, and looked so convinced that I believe she thought much of my capacity for getting wisdom. Then I told her the tale I had told her daughter, with variations, but I only succeeded in getting her consent to see my father. She thought much of my father's wisdom and loved my mother for being the best listener and the safest keeper of a secret in all the county.

I heard there was much clatter in the camps during that May time, but I had friends in each that prevailed, and early in June I married the little maid, and I take some credit for remembering her mother's last words to us at her kind send-off : 'I should have grave misgivings of the outcome of this youthful marriage, were it not that I have faith that you are calculated to make the very best of each other. It is a lifelong partnership throughout which the effects of every little speech and action have to remain the property of both, so, unless your speech and actions tend to increase your faith and love, and make you more fit to stand firm together through every trouble, you will lose a tide that flows but once.'

I had not thought of our honeymoon in such a serious way, and I began to wonder if the plans we had made for spending it would aid to such good purpose. We feared the bustling world and unknown faces and, desiring before all else to have a time to rehearse our new parts unnoticed, had decided to go to The Hunter's Inn, Combe Martin, which is the prettiest spot imaginable, and the hostess, we found, the kindest and most sympathetic soul young married couples could wish for.

How strangely anxious we poor mortals are as to what may be thought of us, and what pains we take that we may not be taken for what we really are !

Nell had done all she could to appear as little like a schoolgirl as was possible, and she was much helped to look a real matron by what she had chosen to go away in, particularly so by the prettiest straw bonnet, with strings tied in a bow beneath the chin, that ever a woman wore. I, having but the slightest downy tint of hair upon my face, to pull at or to twist, except my eyebrows, to which my fingers wandered, tried to think of something else, a cough or trick of speech, to show that I was older than I looked; but it was all in vain, and we had to submit to the motherly treatment of our kind hostess, who placed before us creams and junkets, cakes and jams, in unlimited array, while the food for a man and woman was meagreness itself. Still we came better through the ordeal than the couple who took a valet with them, primed to be careful of his speech that no one should know they were on their honeymoon, for, at their first stopping-place, the other guests took so much notice of their doings that the valet was carpeted; but he most stoutly and truthfully denied having let the secret out: 'Bedad, yer honour,' said he, 'it's every one of me that tould them you wouldn't be marrying for another fortnight yet.'

There is a stream running by The Hunter's Inn:—

It winds through the meadows scarcely seen,
For o'er it the flowers and grasses lean,
And thus, half-hidden, it ripples along,
The whole way singing its summer song.

It was full of trout, some of which gave me great delight by enabling me to show my skill to my little lady and to provide another dish for breakfast. It sounds too much to call it the Heddon River, but 'What's in a name?' For me it was the sweetest little brook that ever flowed. It draws its rise from Challacombe Common, on the border of Exmoor, flows through Holworthy, quite a wee thing, and then on to

Parracombe, after which it becomes of more importance and has little pools in every bend from which an eight-ounce trout may be got if tried for from the rear.

It winds its way through woods and brakes, through orchards, farm-yards, and meadows, until it reaches The Hunter's Inn, and then, with the aid of a still smaller stream, it broadens out and looks as important as it can in its quiet stately travel over its last mile to Heddon's mouth. Even here, in its widest part, your smallest rod, your finest line and cast are sufficient for the last pool of all—quite near the beach. Have with you, there, in early autumn a sea-trout fly or two, for sometimes these fish are there at that time of the year; but not always, as a flood and spring tide must co-exist at the time the fish are passing or they cannot surmount the difficulties of the high beach, through which the normal river has to percolate to reach the sea.

When fishing Exmoor streams it is only by the use of the finest tackle that you can hope to learn, or derive pleasure from, the sport. You may make a giant of a half-pound fish, and you will find he has a giant's strength if your tackle is fair and pleasurable for one but half that weight. The angler who has truly learnt this lesson will be as particular about his tackle when going fishing as about his get-up when going a-courting.

The March Brown is the fly, with a Blue Upright for dropper, but when the river is very low be content with one fly and that the smallest you have.

Come with us in fancy. Nell and I are marching off together for our first full day of married life and we are going a-fishing. I am carrying a basket on my arm that has a broad handle to fit it for such carrying, and it has two half covers on wicker hinges that creak noisily when used. I know this because the opening of one of them caused my companion to

turn round sharply and express surprise at my being so curious. Rock cakes and a tall tin of cream was all I had time to see, and so I told her. I had to shut the lid without further search so that there might remain a chance of some surprise at lunch-time.

Downward we travelled until quite near the sea, and there unloaded. Then we thought we should like to peep through the branches of some boughs that overhung a pool to see if fish were really there. We went on tiptoe, quite stealthily, and we saw a dozen or more, some of which were far too small to catch and keep, but there were at least six that would make really good prizes. The stream was very low, so we retreated as cautiously as we could and then got ready for the fray.

When the stream be low and bright,
Be zure you put on the Blue Upright.

When rain has vallen and water's high,
The March Brown then be zure to try.

Don't be killing little uns when nobody's by
Or big uns'll be scarce before you die.

PAVEY.

The little rod, the finest line, and a brown hair cast, was finished off with a Blue Upright, and I walked round and down so as to fish upstream. I was soon rewarded by a rise, a tussle, and a trout, which, after being weighed in the hand, was declared not big enough according to Pavey's teaching; so back it had to go, but, before it went, I had to show it to a little lady in a holland frock who expressed a hope that the next one would be a little bigger; and so it happened; indeed, it was a little monster of quite seven ounces. Together we emptied the creel of all its sundries and gathered grass to make a bed in it for our prize. Then the lid was closed upon it and I was off to try for its companion. In quick succession

I landed half a dozen which proclaimed themselves too small at the first glance I had of them.

At the head of the pool, where the river narrowed and where the water had most movement, I heard a splash and saw a ring such as only a really good trout could make. Of course I was full of eagerness to catch it, but how to set about it with the greatest chance of success had to be considered. I dried the fly, decided on the spot which would best lend itself to cast from, and then carefully got there on hands and knees. These ceremonies were noticed, and I had to give a reason for them, which I did by pointing to the river and then gesticulating the size my hopes had made the fish. I was much too near it to venture speech; so near, indeed, as to make my covering it as I wished almost certain. It is at such moments that it often happens we make the silliest cast of all the day and thus lose our opportunity for want of nerve. This time the fly fell just where I wished, and as a fly should fall, and I got the fish. Although not quite so big as some one expected from my gestures, it more than realised my hopes as it was quite half a pound.

The excitement caused by the capture of the half-pounder being over, we picked up our belongings and carried them past the weedy shallows on to where a sharp bend gave hopes of others.

Just there, where the water, dark and cool,
Lingers a moment in yonder pool,
The dainty trout are at play;
And now and then one leaps in sight,
With sides aglow in the golden light
Of the long, sweet summer day.

The little wind that blew was up and across the stream and proved most useful. The holland dress was hidden by ferns and high grasses as the wearer made her first cast with the fly—she had practised

on land without a hook—and then there happened what is unlikely to occur, but is much talked of when it does—success at the first cast. A puff of wind took the fly to the limit of the short line, and then it dropped, in the centre of a ring just broadening out, and a trout, which showed its yellow side, went down with it and hooked himself securely. When her prize was in the net the fisher remarked, 'Why, fly-fishing is very simple. Let me try all by myself. You sit down and rest a bit.'

I left her to herself and the fly went out very nicely for a cast or two; then there was a movement of the bracken at the rear which caused me to look anxiously for the little ring the fly would make if it reached the water; and thus I learnt that it was gone. I thought it best to keep this secret for a while as the enjoyment of her expectations was just as great as if she had a dozen flies on, and it was such good practice too.

A well-directed cast towards a ring near the other side caused me to say 'Splendid! Draw off another yard.' Thus encouraged, she worked until the active arm so ached that a rest was needed, and I was called to take my turn. She looked at me for approval, saw a glint of something in my eyes which caused her a moment's thought, and then remarked: 'You want to laugh, but not to tell me why. Now, Phil, be fair, what is it?' I had to tell her, and then we laughed together, had lunch, and commenced to fish again. It was thus we fished and laughed the day away, all too quickly, although we were out so late as to be greeted on our return with, 'We thought you be lost, me dears.'

The sun had set, its glories reflected in scudding clouds, which became thickly dotted as they passed overhead by the complicated evolutions of a flock of rooks that were twirling and soaring higher and higher as they scented the coming storm. To windward

there was a sulky blackness, out of which the wind came with increasing speed, bringing with it detached fragments of darkening clouds that snuffed out, with seeming anger, the remnants of the day.

During the night the wind rose to a hurricane, and voiced itself round the angles of the inn, first in soughings and then in hissing whistlings that compelled thoughts of those at sea. Intermittent dashes of rain, heard on the rattling window, lessened the wind, and it fell again to moanings round the chimneys, and then ceased and gave place to the patter of falling water, from overflowing gutters, that lulled us off to sleep.

It rained the next morning, but in such gentle fashion that we could hear the phiz, whiz, tiz of frying bacon and recognise the crack of eggs on the pan's edge as the morning's meal was being prepared, which presently, the struggling sun, that would show itself occasionally, helped to brighten.

Flies are useless as a lure immediately after a time like this, so nimble fingers made a bag with which I visited the kitchen garden, where I found a store of likely bait. Nothing proves more clearly that we are by instinct hunting animals than our joy at success when we are digging for worms.

By the time I had stretched my back, the sun had got its will, and shone with such brilliancy as made the raindrops on every twig within its reach sparkle so much like diamonds that some one, when she appeared, gathered one upon a finger-tip while wishing, maybe, she could wear a necklace of them.

In spite of the kindly warnings of our hostess, we started without first giving time for grass and bracken to be free of their beautifying, but wet, encumbrances. We tried hard not to go, but off we went, resolved to proceed so cautiously as not to disturb a hanging bead. This proved an easy task for the first half-hour, during which we fished

a broadening eddy from off a bridge near home. The little bit of cork, double the size of a green pea, weighted by a single shot, was no sooner in position and prepared to float away than down it bobbed and a joyous voice responded with: 'I've got him, Phil.' Another little worm on the little hook, and the tiny float bobbed again. Repetitions of these manœuvres soon so thinned the little pool, or frightened the uncaptured ones away, that we had to break fresh ground. We did this so carefully at first that only our feet got wet. Our success in shallow eddies, where the smoky water occasionally revealed the golden gravel, was very great, and the tall bracken which we scrambled through, to get near them, hid us well from sight, but it made us very wet—so wet that we took each other home, slipped upstairs, and had a thorough change of clothes before we showed our captures or ourselves.

The scenes we rambled through on our third day might have been in the wilderness adjacent to, or a part of, the garden of our first parents, and are well worthy of a visit from the busiest of their offspring. A well-marked path, used as a short cut to distant farms, tempted us from the river's course into depths of woodland, where the sunlight flickered down and gave us peeps into deep mystic shades where fairies might be seen if we approached quite noiselessly. Where are the fairies? We had often seen their dancing-rings in the meadows, quite bare and brown with midnight use; where can they now be hiding? Our faith in fairies, so firmly planted in us while too young to learn aught else, had taken so deep a root that my twenty and my companion's seventeen years of life had not nearly worn it out. It softened our tread and speech so much, as we peered here and there in our indefinite expectations, that, when we glanced round corners, rabbits sat up and looked at us, and hares hopped across the path without the

slightest haste. Squirrels that could have told us all we wished to know, at least they looked as if they could, peeped down and round trunks of trees at us, and then raced each other from branch to branch, as if to show us the measure of their happiness. All was so quiet that the undulating flight of a popinjay, which perched on a branch near by, was audible before we saw her or heard the call which quickly brought her brilliantly-coated and moustached lord. We gazed and wondered, first at their perfect forms and colours, and then at the glorious garden in which they enjoyed such perfect trust and happiness, while we two mortals, as completely happy as ever mortals were, had every nerve quite highly strung, looking and listening for we knew not what. So still were we that two pheasants commenced a fight within ten yards of where we stood. First one, and then the other, showed his glittering plumage above the bracken as they made flying efforts to get a weight into their spurs that should equal their furious jealousy. Female witnesses of the encounter were moving the green curtain that hid them, and now and then we heard cackles that would urge their lords to kill or die; and they would have so fought had we not gone forward and separated the would-be murderers by throwing up our arms and crying 'Shoo! Shoo!'

The distorted features of the bleeding birds quite untuned us for seeing fairies, so we retreated to the brook. There we found a path, but it soon grew less and less defined, and then ended in prickly furze and sharp-toothed brambles that sometimes held us prisoners. Even the holland frock was pierced and held until rescued, but it came through its many battles with fewer wounds than my woollen cloth.

Many times that day a funnel-shaped needlecase was opened and held so that the heads came down it for the choosing of the right size, and when all was ready I was ordered to take first one position and

then another as best suited the necessary operation. The position I liked the least was that from which I could not see the rent nor its repairer, and could only guess its measure from the time I had to lie with my nose tickled by the grasses.

When the stream was hidden its varying voice came up to tell us the nature of its channel. Sometimes hopeful gurglings came so invitingly that I had to break my way through all impediments and scramble down high banks clothed with ferns of numerous varieties. These had grown to great perfection under the fostering shade of overhanging boughs that had a dome above of huge limbs of trees, the leaves of which could be heard rustling in the wind, but not a breath came to this downstairs fairyland. The complaining voice of a disturbed nesting-bird sounds loud and harsh where the whispers of the stream and rustling leaves make music; but breaks must come. They sometimes came with the splashing of a prize that was fighting to clear itself from the stretching hair that held it prisoner, and this was sure to bring down through the bushes in the sweetest key of all: 'Is it a big one, Phil?'

I love to watch fish in crystal pools almost as much as I like catching them, and there were some really good ones here, quite unsuspecting of my presence, that probably had never been tempted with an artificial fly. They were busy making spluttering snatches at the more indiscreet members of a host of gnats that hovered and gambolled near the surface of the stream. Brook trout, even when only of minnow size, are perfect in shape and colouring, and it's a fascinating sight to see a shoal of them vying with each other at jumps for flies, so fascinating that your sympathies go out to the little fellows that try their hardest to jump as high and with the same success as their bigger brothers do. You may watch a scene full of happy life like this until the desire to kill is

dulled, and your rod is laid aside while you think a bit or call a comrade to your side to view the picture that stays your hand. I called my companion and, while climbing to assist her down, I cleared a passage of its summer growth to let her see that with some aid the journey might be attempted. When she was safely by the pool, I laid my coat upon the overhanging rock to coax her to stretch herself upon it that she might peep as I had done, and soon we were lying side by side, with our chins resting on our wrists, peering down into a little world of wonders, made more wondrous by the doubling shadows of the fish that came within the sunlit spaces. Flecks of foam, stray leaves, and twirling dimples, came sailing down as if in full enjoyment of some purpose, and the golden pebbles over which they floated took note of them by blinking. Birds, suspicious of our intent, made lame fluttering flights so close to us that we could not but know that they had treasures near, which they would draw us from.

After a short stay I helped my partner up the high bank again, and then travelled from pool to pool, getting a trout or two from most of them, until, in answer to my call that I was moving on, I was told a hedge and wide ditch prevented her further progress. I answered back: 'I am coming,' so as to stay any attempt at leaping, and hastened to climb; but, in my haste, I slipped back and should have had a nasty fall had it not been for a check in my slide that rent my trousers sadly. I had so recently been mended that I was inclined to conceal this last misfortune, but on feeling for it realised it was useless to hope to hide such an opening as I had made, so I dodged a bit, but she smiled a smile that plainly said: 'What is it now?' I showed her, and she exclaimed: 'Oh, dear, I can't mend this. Why, you have torn a big piece out. This makes three pairs you have spoilt already. I think we had better give up

the woods, Phil, and spend the rest of our time as far from thorns and brambles as we can, or what will you be like in a few days more? But where are the fish.'

For answer I turned them out on a mossy piece of turf and put them ship-shape, and, looking at them, I wondered if Nature with all her wondrous bounty offered anything for the food of man more daintily captivating to the sight than these little pictures of strength and beauty. I thought not, and never tired of wandering up and up in search of them. I was sometimes in midstream, at others on the bank, but always casting up from behind some hiding-place.

CHAPTER III

A GIRL'S MAD RIDE—THE SIMONSBATH PONY—WE BEG A CUP OF TEA AND GET A GREAT SURPRISE—ON THE MOOR.

TEN days had flown and we were seated in a spring market cart bound for Simonsbath. Our road for a mile or so was through narrow lanes bound in by high flowering hedges, which the trotting strides of the useful cob would soon have left behind had it not been that the scattered dwellings are mostly built where the road makes its sharpest bends, with their white sides jutting out as if to bar the way. Steady your pace you must. Certainly this gives a chance of passing greetings and a view of the old-world gardens where flowers of every colour make a brave display, which the bordering hedgeside blossoms do their best to rival.

This very lane has sweets that all admire,
The rambling suckling and the vigorous brier;
No fostering hand they need, no sheltering wall,
They spring uncultured and they bloom for all.

Steep hills had to be encountered which, when climbed, gave us opportunities to look down and back upon the scenes where we had been so joyful and talk of the homely people we had left behind. Then came a detour round the height whereon are remnants of a camp that tells of our Roman conquerors; and, soon after, Parracombe came in sight and a view of Holwell Castle. From Blackmoor Gate to Challacombe the road grew more and more deserted, but ever varying. The long climb to Breakneck Hole demanded our walking until we reached the high, level

road, where a view rewarded us in the relief that comes when gazing on a wide expanse of hill and dale while the wind blows freely over miles and miles of heather.

'Do you remember, Phil?'

'Remember what?' was my reply.

'Have you forgotten, sir, that it was quite near here we had that splendid run, during which we twice sighted the stag, once so near that a burning thrill of hope ran through me that Paddy would hang to the voices of the dogs so that I might say I was there when the stag was brought to bay. The dear old horse knew my wish and thundered on through the thin, damp mist, until it grew and grew in blackness, and then I heard your frightened call and had to give up all my hopes just when so near fulfilment.'

'And, "so near being in a bog" was the thought that made me spur and yell to stop that mad flight of yours.'

'Well, I forgive your fears, Phil, but why forget so soon that it was on that occasion you found a soft spot in some one's too soft heart?'

'I remember quite distinctly, madam, every incident of that day from the moment I caught sight of you at the Meet on Paddy's fifteen three, with Dick Vellacott at your side on his long-legged, bony gray, that can arch his neck and paw the ground on any eminence from which a glimpse of the hunt may be snatched. Your father seemed much pleased, while talking to the parson, to note with one eye his daughter's pleasure in her companion and did not notice me.'

'Well! Phil, you can't deny that Richard makes a fine figure on horseback.'

'Oh yes! he looks well enough at a Meet; but has any one ever seen him really ride?'

'Now, sir, confess you would have liked him less had he outstripped you in that gallop, rescued me

from the mist and seen me safely home as you did.'

'Yes, it was a chase, Nell, was it not? Every swing of my little horse, which did not mean to lose you, and every beat of the drizzling mist against my face was as strong wine until I saw the landmark that made me give that yell.'

'And then the dreadful Channel fog, Phil, in which we lost our way and had to trust our horses. The dear old moor, how lovely it looks to-day!'

Here and there we crossed miniature streams that were hurrying down to do their little part in making the River Barle from which we hoped so much. The long, uphill walks and the lovely drive across the heather-scented downs quite prepared us to do justice to the substantial meal provided for us at the little inn that stands in the centre of Exmoor Forest. We received a warm welcome from the forewarned host and hostess, but it was evident that we failed in some respect to fulfil their expectations, for surprise was writ so large we could not but notice it, and, I fear, we blushed in an apologetic sort of way for our shortcomings. We were, however, soon at home with them, and our stay at the inn was an event of which they appeared even a little proud. Indeed, the whole village took the liveliest interest in our goings and comings and were frequently at their doors to see us start upon our journeyings.

Our hostess was most anxious to aid us in determining the routes to take and would frequently be with us before breakfast was over to say: 'Now, where be going to go to-day, me dears? The pony be in the stable doing nort, and I won't have 'ee coming home too tired to ate.'

So I was often to be seen driving a conspicuously white, and conspicuously slow, pony, a demure lady by my side, with her hands across each other in her lap, smiling at my vain efforts to keep the darned

thing straight. Do what I would, I could not get him from his zigzag course to and from the peopled doorsteps. I could pull his head round until it pointed in the desired direction, but the body of the animal drifted as his will desired, until I felt that I was lapsing into a wish to use my tongue as I had heard my father's men do to jibbing horses.

'Please, Phil, don't whip him so. Where is the need for hurrying past? Am I not looking nice?'

'This animal seems to think you are looking more than nice, and is determined to show you round.'

The pony went fairly well in the uninhabited portions of our drives, but stop he would when he met any one he knew, and he seemed to know every one we met. His best paces were reserved for coming home, and we soon found out that he would turn his head the other way so as not to see individuals with whom he would have desired to stop and speak on his outward journey. I had ridden and driven a number of Exmoor ponies, but this one had more tricks than the whole bunch, and at the back of them a temper that was hard for me to master accompanied as I was. One morning he came from his stall dead lame in the off fore-leg, but after a touch with the whip and a run round the yard the lameness was in one of his hind legs. By far the most troublesome day was when, forgetful of his age or determined to impose upon my innocence, he capered like a colt before he could be got between the shafts, or, perhaps, it was to show me what a terrible time we should have if I did not allow him to go the road he wished and stop when he pleased. It was most unfortunate that we had decided on a lengthy journey to Brayford, for he objected, indeed, refused, to go a yard beyond the inn at Sherracombe. I gave him a sounding whack, but the only notice he took of it was to turn his head to see if his friend was with me, and having satisfied himself on that point, he sat back in the breeching, which just held him up from

sitting on the ground. Thinking to humour him, I got out and ordered a pint of cider, some of which I drank before his nose, but with no good result, so I jumped out and got him a drink of water and, as that was fruitless too, tried the whip again; but not as I intended, for there was a hand that stayed my arm. I had seen divers experiments made to start jibbing horses, but there was only one method I dared to try. Full of hope, I gathered up the reins, leaped upon his back, smacked his neck, and cried loudly: 'Tally ho! Tally ho!' He forgot his sulks, his age, the cart, and the lady seated there, and started off with ears bent forward listening for the dogs. The playful lift of his hind quarters, as he spun round the first corner, nearly unseated me, and the long gallop down the steep hill that followed was not a joy, for my legs were spread out and rubbed by the rising and falling shafts; but there I had to sit, bumped on leather and buckle, until, quite out of breath, the little beast stopped suddenly and tilted me on to his ears. That mixture of riding and driving was a surprise to all concerned, including the pony, who was dripping with excitement, and the man who took him in charge at the end of it walked round him, saying: 'Be et you now, Bobby? Be et you? I never knawed 'ee sweat avore.'

The Bray is one of several rivers that have their rise on Exmoor and feed the Taw. From Brayford to Challacombe, some seven miles, beyond which the fisher who is a fisher only should not go, the river course is full of bends and twirling eddies that seem to vie with one another to hold the greatest number of the fish, which appear to be limited only by Nature's provision for their happy upkeep. It winds its way through meadows where the bushes are few and far between, and it comes down through woods and spinneys, seldom trod, where overhanging branches of lofty trees entwine and hazel bushes embrace to

make an archway for the little river that sings so sweetly on its way.

We fished the meadows with much success and enjoyed the shade of an enveloping wood for a lengthened time, but we got lost in an undergrowth much above our heads, and wondered which way it would be best to go. A straw may tell where the wind is, and a sparrow suggest that you are near some dwelling, but it was the bark of a dog that said, 'Come this way.' To beat down the thorns and nettles and make a path that brought us to an orchard hedge was warming work, and it was no easy task to follow the hedge until we found a breach that enabled us to tread the turf beneath the apple-burdened trees. The farm-house that came to view was above the average in outward appearance, and the barnyard was full of contented life. In the meadows beyond was a herd of Devon cattle, and the stackyard, through which we made our way, had bulky ricks of hay and corn.

A happy-faced girl answered our timorous knock, and in a sweet voice said, ' 'Ess sure we will. Please come in; mother's making tea.' We followed into a spacious kitchen to where a woman was pouring water from a kettle that hung over a wood fire and, as she turned in answer to her daughter's voice announcing us and our wish, we saw a real picture of a Devon farmer's wife. The other occupant of the room was a very aged man, eighty-nine he told me, still clear of intellect, and, as I afterwards discovered, brimming over with tales of Napoleon's time.

'I think it only fair to tell you,' said Nell, 'that we have been trespassing and catching your fish; but perhaps you will not be angry, for we have been very careful not to damage the standing crops and have safely shut the gates. We are staying at Simons-bath and taking drives to fishing places. To-day we chanced to come this way, and I was so very thirsty that it made me bold to beg for a cup of tea.'

'You be very welcome, me dear,' said the hostess, to which the old man added, ' 'Ess sure we be glad to zee 'ee, and you may have the vish, if you can catch 'em.'

While thanking him I remarked, 'What a lovely valley, and how prosperous things look everywhere!'

' 'Ess, fay, it be a blessed time; there be food for man and beast in plenty, thank God. May zich times last, for it was not always zo. There may come another Boney or, what is wuss, the harvest fail and whate go to 126 shillings, which was its price in the yur 1812, with men's wages tenpence a day.'

'What a wicked wage to pay with wheat so high.'

The old man smiled pityingly at my remark and replied, 'We had no whate to zell. The harvest failed us. It sprouted avore 'twas cut, and lay about in heaps like dung avore 'twas carried. The bread it made was black. Have you ever tasted bread made from rotting whate?' he asked of me, and, in answer, I said,—

'I had a taste of bread made from sprouted rakin's once, but I did not attempt to swallow it.'

'Lucky lad to have had a choice in zich a matter. Well! ours was black, and so near like zoup that we had to ate it with a spoon. 'Twas sticky and difficult to zwaller, yet women and children would come and cry vor't.'

'Oh! how awful! What did you do?' Nell asked.

'Amongst other things, me dear, we got thin and prayed that the winter might be short and the next harvest plentiful. 'Twas tiresome waiting, but the promise came that we should get all we axed, for the ripe and ripening corn was splendid. Then it rained and rained day after day until all was dung again and the taters rotted in the ground. There was nothing left but turnips. As good men as ever lived and worked, half-starved, got out of hand, stole and burned; some of um went mad and wake women and children died.'



Photo by W. K. Geen.

D.S.

Up the Glen.

Chap. 16.

This harrowing tale of suffering caused me to wonder who, and where, the landlord was, and it was on my tongue to ask the question loudly; but I managed to say so quietly that I surprised myself: 'Farmers surely could not pay rent in such times.'

'Rent!' was the reply, 'I doubt if there was a guinea in all Chittlehampton parish. They were all bought up for Boney and the zilver spent.'

'Did you say Chittlehampton?' I asked. 'Why! that was where my mother lived before she married. Do you know Easticott?'

Grandfer had become excited and my double question proved too much for him. He turned upon me as if I were an apparition with a string of questions: 'Who be you? Who ded ye zay yer mother was? Do I know Easticott? Did I knaw Richard Crocker? We were like britthers in them times and vought zide by zide. The poor mad volks wid mostly listen t'un and stay their devil's doings.'

Then came a silence, during which I thought the old man's soul communed with Dick's, for there was a whispered 'Zomebody be asking if I knawed 'ee, Dick.' The need of his lost handkerchief, discovered by his granddaughter beneath his chair, dispelled his dream, and he asked: 'What was you zaying?'

I replied: 'I was about to tell you that my mother was born at Easticott, and that her name was Mary Crocker.'

'Tha dusn't zay so; cum 'ere and let me zee 'ee.'

He rose and put his hand upon my head and said, 'Ess, fay, you be a son of the rogue that rin off with Mary Crocker to the 'mazement of more'n wan of us. Don't 'ee zee the red curly hair, Martha; you should knaw et.'

'Yes, and I know the voice now. 'Twas strange I did not think of George.'

The sound of wheels caused a little flutter of excitement, and the daughter hastened to be first to greet

her father, who bustled in unconscious that there were strangers until he saw us. There appeared to be a conspiracy of silence, for all he got by his appealing look to his wife was a smile and nod Granfer's way, and from there a shaky nod to where I sat. He turned to me with a smile that quickly faded, took a seemingly involuntary step, halted, and exclaimed, 'Why! it's George Geen over again.' He seemed quite unable to take his eyes from my face until his wife said, 'This is Mrs Geen, Robert.' As he shook hands with Nell, he told her that I so strikingly resembled the man who stole his first sweetheart that for the time he had been lost to all else.

'You did not die of a broken heart,' said Nell.

'No, Mrs Geen, it did not break for Mary, but it would have done had Martha refused me.'

'Where are you staying?' needed a repetition of much that had already been said, and when we told him we were depending on Bobby to take us home he laughed and remarked, 'Oh, we all know Bobby. If you expect to get to Simonsbath to-night perhaps it would be as well to see what Bobby thinks about it. I'll drive you to the inn and see you off, and if he is out of humour I'll take you all the way.'

We had found Bobby most consistent in everything that concerned the homeward journey; as usual he had to be held while we seated ourselves, and then started off leaving quite a trail of dust, and we reached home without trouble before the glory of the setting sun had disappeared.

In due course letters came for us; amongst them was one for my wife from her mother, with one enclosed from brother Jack, posted in Melbourne, at the sight of which she exclaimed: 'Jack's alive, Phil. Fancy his being alive after all these years of silence! I must cry, I know I must. Oh! fancy mother, I'm sure she wants me.'

'Steady, dear, steady. Now we shall know the

reason of Jack's being alive—I mean of his not writing.'

Jack was the bold bad boy that michted from school with me and took his thrashings with such Spartan-like courage. He was one of the multitude that rushed to the Australian goldfields in 1853, and being an only son a great fuss was made about his going. All the mothers his mother knew gave advice as to what he would need while on so long a voyage, and conferences were held as to the cakes and biscuits to be made and as to the best method of preserving eggs. Some helped on the sewing and talked of the prodigal's return with gold, while others drank tea, talked sadly, and wept. Mr Holloway, the tailor, and Mrs Holloway, were at work for him every day for weeks together, and the clothes they made looked very suited for digging gold; and the double set of tools that Thomas King, the blacksmith, made would dig up anything. His boxes were packed with everything that could be suggested by kind-hearted folk, and in every corner that could hold nothing else was his mother's and sister's love.

This was Jack's letter :—

'No doubt you will be surprised to hear from me after so long an absence, but I have been ill and down on my luck. My misfortunes commenced on the passage out, and it was all about a woman. She was travelling alone under the captain's guardianship to relatives in Melbourne, and she was such an angel, mother, that every one of us fell in love with her. I thought I was the one she favoured most, but I suppose she found a difficulty in choosing from amongst so many. Go where she would the other fellows were buzzing round her like a swarm of bees, and it was just this crowding that led to her falling overboard. She was standing by an opening in the bulwarks when a sailor had to force his way past the

stupid asses that were gathered round, and she got pushed into the sea. The fellows, I amongst them, dived in like rats from off a rick of corn when the ferrets are first put in. Fortunately a boat was at the stern and we were all picked up. The captain seemed much put out and made us stand in line while he walked along our front with the dripping yet lovely girl. "Now, my dear," said he, "the best thing you can do is to take your choice." She passed us each in turn with a sorrowing smile, and then chose the only fellow that had feared to wet himself. Who do you think it was? Why, smooth-tongued John Pengelly! John was ever a lucky fool, while I was broken-hearted and unfit to leave this place, and here I have been ever since. At last I have an opportunity of reaching the gold-fields, but I need an outfit and tools to be equal with my chum. Fifty pounds is all I want, and I shall be able to make my fortune; but do let me have it quickly or I shall lose my chance.'

'Phil, why do you smile? Poor Jack, he would be the first to jump in.'

'No doubt of it, Nell, but I am sorry he did not send this letter sooner and get the help he so much needed; besides, all the other fellows may have told the tale by this time.'

'What does that matter? I didn't think you were so unfeeling, Phil. I don't believe your heart would break if I fell overboard and was drowned.'

'What! not break at the loss of you, little wife! Why! if it didn't, I would tear the thing right out and jump on it.'

From Exford we fished the Exe to Lyncombe without let or hindrance; the only objection came from our shaggy friend, who considered the journey unreasonable. From Withypool by the brook's side to Bradley was another experience of making paths through prickly furze and brambles to reach bends

in which there were depths that held fish innumerable, from which we half filled our little creel.

For our last day we were on the moor, where the Barle is but a trickle and there is little chance of fish; but we were on the moor, whose fascination has always held me true to my first love of Nature. It was here, on her broad bosom, that I often breathed my boyish troubles with a perfect faith that she would understand. She was to me a second mother, whose arms stretched from everywhere for me. She was in the hills and in the dales and wafted back to me gentle, soothing breezes, until I have laid me down and slept with a vow upon my lips that I would try to be the little man my mother wished.

It was thus we spent our first three weeks of married life, each day of which struck a blow to rivet the bonds the Church had bound us in. That youthful, joyous time remained with us a sweet, and sometimes a laugh-provoking, memory to be marshalled out to scare away cares and troubles, and from it I chose to write the guidance asked for by my son.

CHAPTER IV

'Tis not that rural sports alone invite,
But all the grateful country breathes delight.

COURTING THE QUEEN OF FISHES—A DISAPPOINTMENT

I KNOW no river with such never-ending pictures of delight nor one so full of surprises at every turn, in all seasons, as the Thames. You cannot catch it out of tune. Its rich alluvial soil has given birth to a wealth of meadow flowers and an endless variety of trees, bushes, and brambles, scattered in a higgledy-piggledy fashion that has more art to please than the most artful man could plan.

Thames trout fishers have time to spare for what the meadows have to show and to listen to the voices that tell again of boyhood's days, and I know no sport of which it can be so truly said that its votaries need a love of country sights and sounds.

One of the cleverest and most persistent Thames trout fishers I know has not taken a fish that he would keep for the past two seasons, and yet he goes on trying; and so have I done, although until this season I had fished in vain as long as he. There is a fascination in striving for a trout, whose size is equal to your dearest wish, that has allured you back to his haunt, time after time, by occasionally showing himself and sometimes playing tricks with your bait that have stiffened your joints for the tussle you thought imminent.

I have striven so often for the fish I have in mind that we have grown familiar with each other's ways. He will not accept my offerings, but he takes no exception to my visits, and rarely fails to give me the welcome tidings of his being still at home. The

little fishes fly in terror when he rises to pursue them, my lure at times in their very midst as frightened as the rest, and more than once the huge fellow has flicked my bleak with his tail as he has turned to seize his selected quarry. He is not one of your just-at-daylight-feeding fish that need some one's sitting up to call you early, but one without set hours for meals, and, if he has a preference, it is to wait for his food until the sun has warmed the day a bit.

On one occasion I started trying for him at six a.m. It was nearly ten when I got a sight of him. He rose and drove a shoal of bleak to midstream, where, doubtless, he got some satisfaction, for over an hour passed before he rose again; then scudding leaps of frightened fish that saw his stealthy rise prepared me for his reappearance. He rose to near the surface and made fruitless snatches to his right and left in his onward rush, which brought him so near the punt that I could see his size and colourings. This and the flashes of the resplendent creature's sides, as he made half turns to seize his prey, so stamped themselves upon my brain that I could see his likeness in the water long after he had disappeared.

How many times I have striven to be equal to that fish's capture I do not rightly know, but, for many hours, during many days, oft when the wind was in the east, I have sat, not always feeling very warm, and hoped to catch him. I am hoping still.

Every live bait, from a minnow, attached to the smallest hook and finest gut, to an eight-inch roach, has been tried in turn. That sweet morsel, well liked by trout, a gudgeon, I have shown him often. Favourite phantoms, fresh from victories with the comparatively silly salmon, and other spinning lures, have been cast wide outstream and brought cannily to the spot where he must see them; but, as yet, I have not got him. How many times during the lovely month of May alone I have striven to catch that trout I fear to say;

what it has cost me need not be counted as the *quid pro quo* was always everywhere.

I am a persistent angler, as may be gathered from the statement that fishless days innumerable have fallen to my lot, and that when they have come to me in batches of a dozen the thirteenth day has found me hopeful. The red-letter days I have had stand out in bold relief to tune my brain to happy nights in dreamland during which I see, and catch, much larger fish than those which, in vain moments, I have had stuffed and put in cases.

To-day I am off to meet a fisherman who has a big trout marked down at Clewer Point and a still bigger one in Boveney Weir. He is a clever and enthusiastic professional Thames trout fisher, whom I have often admiringly watched search a pool with a live lure without the aid of what he calls 'the disturber.' 'What do you think, Mr Geen, I say? When they see that cork being jerked back, why, ask yourself, wouldn't you feel as it was something as was going to hit you? These old trout knows yer game directly they see a float, eh? I say. Why, when you do yer best the game is hardly worth the candle, I say, Mr Geen, but if you begin by showing 'em floats it's a mug's game.'

We met at Windsor, and, as I took my seat in the punt, I noticed that X—— had a trouble, but I did not ask the cause as I knew that I should be made acquainted with it soon.

'No motor-boat as yet, I say, Mr Geen, I say, and not a wink of sleep, I say, not a wink, and somebody else didn't either, and I'll see as she don't until I gets the boat. Women are all very well, but there's no business in 'em; they can't see farther than their noses. What's the use of my telling her there's money in a motor-boat? Not a wink of sleep all night, I say, and there won't be any, I say, Mr Geen; would you?'

'Well,' I said, 'I think if I were you I should try

some other plan, for you know it has been written of woman,—

She never slavishly submits;
She'll have her will, or have her fits.

How would it do for you to think you don't want a motor-boat and to tell her that you are glad now you took her advice?

He stayed his punting to reply, 'Well! I'm blowed if I didn't tell the missus, this very morning, that if I didn't want a motor-boat she'd be the first to say to me: "When every waterside man who lets boats has got a motor on the hire system, you'll be thinking about buying one I suppose?"' So she would, I say.'

I fear I was in a teasing mood, and I replied, 'There must be two sides to a question of to-be or not-to-be, and we should not blame a woman for choosing to be cautious. I think women much more far-seeing than men. Now supposing anything were to happen to you, and your widow married a man who, not having sixpence of his own, cared more for cash than motor-boats. Just think how pleased he would be to have the money ready to his hand to invest as he chose.'

'Would he? Will he? Well, I'm blowed! I say, Mr Geen, as widows shouldn't be allowed to make fools of themselves, I say.'

'You wouldn't, I suppose,' said I, 'care to go in for the Indian plan of burning widows with their husbands' bodies?'

'Do they do that, Mr Geen? Well, I'm blowed! But they do give the unmarried ones a chance, don't they?'

We were not favoured with a sign from the Clewer Point fish although we stayed to tempt him for fully three hours, but X—— did not tire me, as some fishermen do, with repeated assurances of its existence. It is a pleasing trait of this man's character that what he has said, he has said, and does not add to.

Fish have their fast times; so most anglers think, and many loudly proclaim that they are too frequent and prolonged. Thames trout are really very trying; not so much because of their fastings as for their whimsical changings of feeding-time. The month of April may slip by before you have marked down and learnt the time of feeding of a good fish, and May pass away before you discover that the lengthening of the days has caused him to take his first meal so much sooner that a very early start is necessary if one would be with him then.

Boveney Weir, where lay our second hope, is an old wooden structure that has a fishy look which permits of no surprise that a varied basket results from fishing there. Its rush and tumble at the fall give an aerated sparkling to the flow, even when the river is at its lowest, that hides the going in and out of trout amongst the piles and concrete blocks. The breadth of the river at the falls is great and it broadens out considerably below, where the crumbling clay bank gives way in answer to each flood and frost. Chub and barbel choose such ground as this to grub amongst, and I have had good sport with them when the water has been high and coloured so that they could not see me.

On the other side there are overhanging trees of lime, ash, and withy, and below them flows a smooth, dark, straight run of water which, I am told, holds one good fish at least. I chose a gudgeon for my first offering and, while I was watching its tossing on the foam to see if it swam with the freedom I desired, it was seized between the big white lips of a chub that, as these fish usually do, hooked himself securely. Careful to avoid this danger-spot for my second gudgeon, I cast beyond it to where the water was easing to a more gentle flow, and then, jealous of my chances, I brought it across and back again at each let out of line. Some half-dozen yards went out in

this way, and then I wound back with some little haste to excite to a decision any trout that might be deliberating; for thought with trout means wisdom. Trout that have cut their wisdom teeth are in little danger from man's temptations excepting only when they are as mad as mad can be. The May-fly week is your only chance on many rivers, and then the biggest fish seem the maddest; but a Thames trout has lived in such luxury from his cradle up that no fly moves him nor any particular season. You must get him on the rush, when in pursuit of food, by some antic of your lure that shall attract his attention beyond all else that flees from him. There is just one other chance; and that is when he has come from out his haunt and risen high to mouth with gusto the freshened water of a weir-fall. He may be tempted then to seize a bait that is being tossed and swayed here and there, while the attachments that hold it are hidden in the confusion of bubbling water. Perhaps, without a thought of feeding, he may be irritated by the frivolous movements of the little fish so near his aristocratic nose and snatch in temper at such seeming impudence. No sport resulted from my efforts beneath the trees, but, while making them, I had twice to run to assist my fisherman to land first a barbel and then a chub.

There was a perfect little tumble of water at the clay bank corner that invited a trial, and it was there I got the excitement of the day. A fish seized my bait with a tug that thrilled through me, and its deep dive and rush gave hope, strengthened each moment by my powerlessness to stay his course, that I had a trout. To add to my chances of a successful issue to the struggle, the course the fish had taken enabled me to round the corner of the weir and go some distance along the high bank to where my efforts would have their best chance of preventing his getting back amongst the piles. The line was taut, the rod bent, my footing safe back beyond the crack that denoted the field's

next tribute to the stream, and I was ready in the position of my choosing for whatever the fish might do.

Now expectation cheers his eager thought,
His bosom glows with treasures yet uncaught.

Nerves braced for a struggle, as mine were, need that struggle for their pleasurable relaxation or a jerk ensues which may be likened to the shock that comes when a cheated foot does not meet the expected stair. The strain which I offered as a challenge produced no answering rush but two or three short half-hearted dives, and then the fish yielded and came to my winding like a sodden log, and an onlooker, much taller than myself, cried: 'Only a barbel,' in such a tone and with such a sigh that I fancied he felt relieved. It was a barbel—the longest, thinnest, ugliest, and beastliest I ever saw. The tall man was anything but handsome, even when he smiled, but he was not in it with the barbel.

Many rebukes have been cast upon writers on angling that by accounts of special days 'they delude poor wights into the hope that they may do as much themselves whene'er the mood may enter upon them to take it in hand.' I fear that what *I* have written of Thames troutting may be a deterrent to a novice, so in my next chapter I will change the scene to the prettiest spot on all the Isis, a spot of which I have the happiest memories and where—and near thereby—I have had most of my successes with this fish.

CHAPTER V

WOMAN'S SUCCESSFUL PLOTTING—A PROSPEROUS FARM AND ITS HAPPY OCCUPANTS—I STEAL AWAY IN THE GRAY DAWN AND GET A FISH FOR BREAKFAST.

COUNTRY folk cannot stand the noise, dust, and smells, to say nothing of the worries, of a city, without hungering now and then to tread the meadow grass and sniff the scents that come from it. That wife of mine had much conceit of her knowledge of every symptom that foretold my coming need of country air; a word pitched too high and she favoured me with a look much like my mother's when she viewed a protruding tongue and prescribed salts and senna. The wife's prescription for this out-of-sorts aided and abetted me in filching days from duty. Indeed I had to go, for, when her persuasion failed—it seldom did—she would plead fatigue, and become so pale, in the briefest time, that for her sake we stole off together.

There can be no doubt that whatever portion of my economy it may be that gives way to fag, the remedy for it is with every tree and bush that breathes pure air, for I am no sooner with them than I feel myself on the ~~up~~grade. I was very queer, so Nell said, and those of my fellow-men I had to meet were very tiresome and nothing less than all their own way would do for them. Every one and everything was growing daily grayer when a letter came from a Thames-side farmhouse, with an invitation for us both, which said, 'The country here is at its best, and George says there are trout in the weir-pool waiting to be caught. Wire the time of train and he will be at Farringdon to meet you.'

I looked at the face opposite me but not a muscle moved in answer to my scrutiny, so the invitation may have come at this particular time by chance, but it was passing strange that when affairs assumed this cloudy aspect letters would come, some to say, 'I have a permit and the Fly is up'; others, 'Come at once, splendid stock of birds: hares and rabbits doing mischief and must be shot.'

We had a hearty greeting from our friends, a mid-day meal with them, and then much gossip and farm talk; and after that there were stock and crops to see.

The old and substantial house, judged by appearances, was planned when money was plentiful and the family for whom it was built small, for the rooms were large and lofty, though few in number. Since then additions have made it a well-arranged and spacious home.

I doubt whether the outward appearances in the carrying on of any trade so readily disclose signs of prosperity, or the reverse, as do those of a farm. To rest an arm on the outer gate that gives admittance to the private road and take a peep at this comfortable-looking farm-house, with its well-trained, flowering creepers, closely shorn lawn, and long array of substantial outbuildings, would make any countryman pleasedly expectant. During our walk I saw stacks of sweet old meadow hay, ricks of well-saved corn, up-standing gates and well-trimmed hedges, housed carts and implements; and all had a tongue to say: 'There is heart and pride in our farming.'

Sleek coats on horses' backs, fat bullocks' level rumps, restful pigs, and chuckling hens—all told of plenty. Rabbits' ear-tips amongst the grass; hares springing from their forms and going away with a sideway gallop; partridges calling their newly-hatched broods, and cock pheasants strutting and pecking near the coppice, showed that their market value had

not been needed by my friend. And last, but by no means least, the growing crops were free of weeds and the fallows clean.

The farm is an extensive one, with about 200 acres of arable land, rich, deep, and responsive to its treatment. It is possible that my friend's good fortune in possessing such fruitful fields is responsible for his pronounced opinion that there is more merit in muck than in science, for he spoke with some warmth on the subject :—

'Our scientific friends who would teach us how to farm have made us think and talk a bit, but, unfortunately, they don't stay long enough on a place to show us that their scientific methods are better than our old-fashioned ways. Going to an Agricultural College they get matured opinions as to the capabilities of a farm, by a few experiments, before they are twenty-one, while it has taken us all our lives to learn the temper of our fields. Artificials are all very well as a tonic, but we rely on something more substantial to give us weight and quality at harvest.'

It is a very rare occurrence to find first-class farming and a good head of game on the same farm, but here we had it, and that the one interfered so little with the other was accounted for by the whole of the one being below a main road and the other all above.

On the side of the hill is a thirty-acre oak-studded wood, with an undergrowth of hazel, bramble, and bracken that has two twenty-acre rough pasture fields next its longest side, over which the birds make their flight to reach the coppice. The furze brake with its grass-grown rides and sunny aspect is a grand holding, and the numerous and lengthy double-crowned hedges are happy hunting-grounds for a gun each side while well-trained Cockers work them.

The sun had set and it was almost dusk when we reached the river, just to have a peep to help the

hopes and plannings for the morrow's doings. Our coming there was most opportune, for the weir-pool was full of life, which was with great suddenness added to by the rise and rush in chase of quite a large trout. Our host was delighted at this and said, 'How would that one do for you, my boy? It's no good looking at your watch. He'll be there to-morrow and'—with a wink—'perhaps the day after.'

It was glorious to wake at dawn after a vivid dream in which I saw the fish again chasing little fish in all directions and, fearing he would not see the one upon my hook, I moved it seductively to and fro until there was a mighty swirl close to it and, after that—a long time after—the line tightened and I knew I had him on.

Our hostess had placed a jug of milk, a loaf, and a plate of butter on the table in response to my whispered information that I should steal away and have an early try for a fish and be back to breakfast. I have drunk the milk and shall eat the bread and butter as I go.

To tramp off brimful of imaginings of hungry fish seeking their morning meal, at an hour when the vitality of our mind is at its fullest, is to give rosy hues to our ambition. My legs, to keep pace with my thoughts, broke their walk and, when I discovered this, I said, 'I will not run although there is no fear of a witness to my hurrying; I am in an unpeopled world as yet; but it is unwise to commence to fish when heated and flurried; it would be better to walk leisurely and watch the gray dawn grow into day. See how the bowl of the sky grows, and presently the sun's forerunners will be here to disperse the misty curtain that still hides the tree-tops, and then the birds will warble their welcome to the coming day.' Waking noises came singly, from here and there, at first, and then grew in number until they came from everywhere, and there was one great hum of joy, and

the earth itself seemed freshly glad to respond with a springy lift to each footstep.

It will occur to a fisherman sometimes during the journey out to wonder if he is leaving aught behind that he should have with him. This thought was so strong within me as I neared the weir that I had ultimately to stop and turn my basket out, only to find that all I was likely to need was there. Even after that I became unsatisfied again and my dissatisfaction grew until I felt sure that when I reached the water I should find myself minus an essential for commencing work. My relief was great when at last I remembered it was the little lady, from whose side I had stolen while she slept, that I had left behind, and I laughed so loudly at this discovery that a startled blackbird left his roost with a severely rebuking 'Clang, clang, clang.'

A breathing time amongst such scenes in the early hours points its silent moral, and the peace and rest it gives should make us as fit as fiddles. I was feeling very fit as I approached the moss-covered, wooden structure, that so pleasingly nestles amongst high trees and overhanging bushes. It is a joy to look on it, and you are sure to wish while doing so that the dear old weir may serve its purpose for long years to come before giving way to an ugly, modern substitute. To my mind the picture it makes is worth a day's travelling to get a sight of, for man's handiwork has grown with age to fit and match with Nature so perfectly as to almost destroy the lines of difference. There is a special joy for the angler who looks beneath the surface of its bubbling waters, for there he will see the heads of wooden piles that vexed poachers long since dead, and that are a terror still to those who try to net the trout for which the pool is noted.

A misty vapour formed from the falling water glided down the pool and gathered into a cloud that hid the surface of the water and the branches above

it at the far end, so I had to give some thought as to where my lure would fall when I should cast in that direction. First I tried near the bush I had hidden behind, which commands a miniature foaming rush that twiddles round a green-headed, sunken pile. I had put my rod and tackle together some little distance off, for the vibrations of one's footsteps are more alarming to the fish than sound; so imagine I have crept with watchful step and softest tread to make my cast across the seething water. In answer to it a fish rose. I saw his huge spotted sides as he turned twice to seize my lure, but I did not get him. There remained the satisfaction that I had not snatched with hasty hope that he had the bait: so probably I had not alarmed him. Evidently not, for after a pause I cast again and as I watched the silver-coated lure coming across the churning water a dark form hid it for a moment and then the burnished side of a turning trout flashed a light that enabled me to see the size of the fish as it dived and tugged the line. Yes, I had the monster on, for a turn of my wrist and his deep dive caused him to feel the hook and rush in temper, with shaking head, twice round the pool, and then fling himself high above the water, so near me that I saw his form in detail, and I had more anxiety and desire to have him than I shall feel for my next dozen uncraftily-wild, rushing salmon. Hook a salmon, and the odds are eight to one the fish is yours, but the odds are the other way when you have hooked a trout on fine tackle in one of the old weir-pools of the Upper Thames. There is an apron to which the fish may come and cut the line upon its edge. There are piles studded here and there round which he has loved to swim, feeling secure while near them. Still I have him on, and he is much less violent than at first, and, with the exception of his once being round a pile for a moment, we have been on excellent terms, primarily, I must confess, because the weighty brute has had

his will with me. Oh ! If I only had some stronger tackle on there would be a fight I should have some patience with. Stay, I must not forget there is need for the greatest patience with the finest tackle and the glory is greater when one so succeeds. Round and round he travelled, in and out, sometimes so slowly in spite of all my dare of lifting that it might have been the bottom of the pool which was shifting or that the fish by his contemptuous treatment of me meant to say : 'Oh ! go and hang yourself or go back to bed.'

There are no means, so far as I know, of measuring the length in hours of impotent, agonising minutes. I have taken many trout from where I stood, but only of such a size that I could lift their noses so that their struggles brought them over the apron when they sought its dangerous shelter. No precedent that I could think of seemed of use. I shufflingly shifted my position a yard or two, how many times I do not know, but always to return to the spot that up till then had kept me clear of the serious entanglement I feared. I shortened his rests in sundry places by a wrist strike—all I dared—but his movements were so slow for such a lengthened period that the strain on my uplifted arm nearly fixed it with cramp and I was glad to give it freedom, by a change of holding, and a flick or two.

At last, after visiting many times every other portion of the pool, he came towards me beneath the rush of water and, when quite close, came almost to the surface, just where I had hooked him, and added to my fears by showing that he was but lightly hooked outside his mouth by the tail triangle of the flight that the bleak had spun on. It was then I did a foolish thing : I changed back the rod to the rested arm; the movement was seen; the frightened fish turned and plunged, and, in doing so, struck the trace with his tail and freed himself. There is much that might be said far more appropriate for such occasions than

is likely to occur immediately on the heels of the misfortune. A very pious man, or the most philosophical one, would be less likely to surprise himself if he remained speechless for a while. Time, at times of trial, before speech is everything, for each and all of us need some meditation before we can say an appropriate equivalent of: "'Tis better to have loved and lost,' etc.

The loss of that much-coveted fish was grievous at the time, but now it is a mere incident in a day of pleasing memories. Then I felt that my greatest hope of achievement for that day had gone, and it was with sobered ambition I lit a morning pipe and tried to think it would be almost as pleasing if I could but get a smaller fish to show that such early rising and desertion were warrantable.

The smoky mist that had hung so long at the tail of the pool cleared when the sun came on the withy boughs, and flies, perhaps while using legs to rub sleepy eyes, were falling, to the great delight of bleak that made the steady flow of water there look as if huge raindrops were pattering down. This sight was bringing to my mind that the bleak were giving great advertisement of their whereabouts when they fluttered simultaneously on the surface to fly in all directions from a fish that showed his tail plainly. Now quickly for a bleak! I have a steady hand, but somehow I am thumbish now, and it is a long time I take before I am ready to cast a fly to get the live bleak I need to pay down to the spot. At last I have a bait, a beauty of medium length, stout and strong, and it is held tenderly by the lip hook while a light triangle is falling back against its side, and so it is going to the spot against its will drawn by the current and a wee bit of cork. It went by the spot and was drawn back without a sign of notice being taken, but I did not cease my drawing; I rather hastened it to show that the bleak would escape him yet.

This proved, as it often does, fatal to the following fish.

It is a strange fact, attested to by a number of my friends, that, while playing a fish that ultimately escapes, a fisher will often have a presentiment of what is about to happen. I had certainly momentarily expected the loss of the big fish while I have great hopes of this the smaller one. Were it not that even this gives me anxious care the battle would be too one-sided for the joy I shall feel should I succeed. Judging by what I saw of him when he leaped at the end of his first rush, that almost took him to the bushes from which the flies had fallen, he is at least five pounds, and his boring to the bottom on his return to deeper water gave me opportunity to put on a strain that told of quite that weight.

Again he did the journey to the bush and his tail flicked amongst the leaves of the slim sprouts that bend to the water's surface, but no entanglement came of that, and he was steadily coming my way again to get all the strain I dared. I felt he was making for the apron and did all I could to lift him above the water that eddies back beneath the rush so that he might have rough water to contend with. I was just in time to get his nose above what he intended to go under, and his momentum took him among the silky weeds that coat the apron. He nosed among them as if to hide from a foe he had left behind, but, after much expense of strength, he ultimately dropped back. He was never given another chance to get deeply down, so he could only struggle to the limit of my permission, until his mouth opened against the stream, where he was held until he turned upon his side ready for the net.

A vain man's vanity, unlike a woman's, is immeasurable, but I think there should be some pardon for such an ancient form of it as being puffed up at the smiling welcome of her whose smiles we covet on our

return from a successful chase. I should have got a smile had I been fishless, but there was extra pride in look and speech emphasised by uplifted hands when I laid my prize out, so I claim some credit for doing all I could to look as little proud as possible.

Trout cutlets, fried in bacon fat, made an appetising dish, to which we all did justice.

The walk to reach the old weir again, prolonged by halts, was a perfect way to see the life of things which had been hidden somewhat in the early morning mist; nor was I alone.

I praise the Frenchman, his remark was shrewd,
How sweet, how passing sweet is solitude;
But grant me still a friend in my retreat,
Whom I may whisper solitude is sweet.

Nell could wield a rod or ride a horse in a dainty way, and knew more of Nature's floral details than I can ever do with my merely rough and ready love for groups of these.

The meadows, in the distance, appeared to wear a cloak of gold that waved in the bustling wind as if of molten metal, while near our feet we could see a daisy waistcoat, with a clover bloom or two, on a cloth of green. The hedgerows that framed the meadows were full of colour, commencing with the ditches, where flowers fed by winter's floods grew to heights they seemed quite proud of, and, arching down from high up, branches of wild rose, full of bloom, some white, some pink, made garlands numerous that gave finishing touches to make the picture perfect. A medley of sweet scents from herb and bloom, not yet free of the morning's dew, delayed us further, and meanwhile the happy hum and buzz of little life grew big and wondrous. There is a spell in the sound of falling water, and, as it came to us, lagging steps were hastened by the magic of it until we stood together once again on the most sport-giving weir—for trout—that I know of.

A day will often pass without a boat's going through the lock, and it may happen you will have no chance of speech other than with your companion to this spot. He, or she, and you must sit close together for the fishing if either of you have aught to say, as the best spot is where the fall of tumbling water makes most noise; the speaking lips must almost touch the attentive ear. Yet, strange to say, above or within the roar of the seething waters there comes, quite distinct, the whispered song of its gladsome hiss and kiss to all obstructions. The lady, who sat by me, had much to say as she watched the churned foam, bedecked with bubbles, break away in lengthy lines that reached the leafy boughs which hid the pool's outlet, and, when the sun's rays were freed from the shadows cast by clouds which wind from out the west had brought, her lips almost touched a listening ear to say, 'Oh, how lovely those streams of diamonds are, and see how the big bubbles wink as they go along.' 'Lock, lock!' seemed a discordant cry in such a place, at such a time, although it came from Oxford College boys—I beg their pardon, 'men'—and unnecessary, too, since no lock-man heard; it is a help-yourself lock and weir of which I write.

CHAPTER VI

Let the fisherman his art repeat,
Where bubbling eddies favour the deceit.

MINNOWS, PLEASE—SHOOTING A FOX—A TERROR OF
A PIKE—A BIG OTTER

FROM behind the bush where my early morning's treadings had trampled the rank growth into the soft clay, I waited patiently for a cloud to spread its shadow, and then cast my lure and brought it back through the darkened, tumbling water with my every nerve expectant. How much the big fish was responsible for this strained effort I cannot say, but certainly it was owing much to the fact that our host had told me there were several good trout in the pool, and some one or two of them must be beneath this rush. A dozen casts, with intervals between for coming clouds, lessened my hope to nothingness and, as my leaving the shelter of the bush to spin from an open and elevated spot—the only other place available—would be to show my every movement to the inhabitants of the pool, I decided to try again the method that got me the fish before breakfast.

Prior to any change of tackle it was my duty to say a word to Nell, who, to demonstrate that all was well and nothing mattered, was doing crochet work which, when she saw me coming, she stretched several ways and then patted on her knee, while her perky head went sideways to look at it, then up at me to ask if I did not think she was looking better. I had no chance to answer this before it was added to by: 'How lucky we were to be invited here when

you needed a change so much! Don't you think so?"

At mathematical problems that have given quantities sufficient for their solution, without the aid of the algebraic x , I am really strong, but the wife's involved questions I try to jump, as I have a notion that in some mysterious way they serve a purpose without their answers.

"Would you mind, dear, taking the fly rod and catching me a bleak, while I change my tackle?"

"I have one, Phil. Bring the can," came before I was quite prepared, so there was little delay before the freshly caught fish was swaying and dancing on a bubbling run as if in fear of an enemy below. Such movements sometimes rouse a trout, and frequently a pike, to come to the surface with a rush, although at that particular time they would make no effort for the daintiest morsel that might be going by them unencumbered and without fear. This kind of cowardice is not peculiar to fish, and, although it is far from being a pleasant thought, we have to think it a law of nature that the weak shall be at the cruel mercy of the strong.

A consequential pike, for which I would not have crouched so low, seized the little fish, and, after darting here and there and fighting lustily in vain, opened his mouth and shook his head to give back what he had taken; but all too late, and he fell a victim.

The pool was spoilt for a time, so, having no thought of fishing, I stretched myself upon the grass in such a way that my arms came to the wall, and, with my chin on them, I peered into the clear depth below, to find the only apparent movement on the gravel was caused by fleeting shadows of travelling flecks of foam. But my farewell peep, intended for the shadows, showed a scurrying host of minnows that were being snapped at by perch, which could be plainly seen mouthing the dainty tit-bits. Perch are a prize for the table, so I was soon wide awake and

anxious for their capture. I crept away, made a paste of bread, and put the tiniest bit upon the point of my smallest hook and, after much time and several disappointments, caused by their dropping off the hook, secured three minnows.

There was great excitement as the wife cautiously drew near to drop a floated line, with a minnow on the hook, at the spot where I had seen the perch. Before the float had answered to the shot it glided off and down, and the fisher, surprised by this, did not strike and thus lost a chance and her minnow. At the next effort, unnerved by her failure, she thought the float too long in cocking, struck, and lost a second minnow. Still determined, she answered my caution with :—

‘Don’t fidget, please ; any one would have been taken in as I was. I am sure to have him this time.’

I hope the third and last minnow was not hurt more than was necessary through my anxiety to hook it securely, for it was pained in vain if pained at all; the lady caught her hook in a flowering weed that grew from the wall down near the water and in freeing it, lost the lure. I was quick to be first to speak, but only just in time, for my wife’s lips were parting as I commenced :—

‘Hurrah ! the hook is safe; you cleared it cleverly. We can easily get more minnows, but the hook is just the size to hold big perch, as you will find when you have one on.’

The opening lips closed as I commenced, and became so firmly set as I proceeded that a stranger seeing them might have thought it a challenge to me to try a burglar’s jemmy to open them—that is, if he had not seen the dimples on the chin and the suspicion of a sparkle in the corner of her eyes, which said to me : ‘My turn will come.’ It came in the tone of ‘Salt, please,’ to a waiter : ‘Minnows, please, Phil.’

Shall I ever understand this little bag of mysteries ?

Will it for ever be the unexpected that will happen? Shall I for ever be armour-plating and loading guns and still remain defenceless?

'Minnows, please,' was an innocent request if viewed with my statement 'We can easily get more,' but it assumed quite a different aspect judged by the fact that she knew the three minnows she had lost had cost a trifle over twenty minutes each to capture. Hence the artfulness of 'Minnows, please.'

I have never been able to understand the affinity that exists between boys and minnows. You have only to see a boy carrying a glass pickle jar of these friends of his to observe how happy they are with him and he with them. Of course I don't pretend to say there is no love between men and minnows, because they are distinctly a lovable little fish; but the fact remains that the only man I ever saw carrying a bottle of them looked as if he would be as glad to be rid of them as I was of an umbrella that a gust of wind played havoc with in Regent Street. Minnows will take food off a bent pin if offered by a boy; indeed, their love for boys and glass jars will often cause them to make attempts to swallow the pin while obstinately refusing the daintiest morsel from a man.

When Nell said: 'Minnows, please,' I determined quickly to take her with me and, if possible, surrender the pleasure of catching them to her. It so happened that I had very recently had the honour of escorting her to Shoolbred's, where I was much impressed by the politeness, grand manner, walk, and feet of the shop walker; so when I said: 'This way, madam, for the minnow department,' I waved an arm and walked as the shop walker had, and, when at the end of the walk, I offered a seat; that is, I did it as nearly as might be without practice or a chair. I did him so well that the lady entered into the fun and gathered her skirts together with a side-look for the pretended chair.

The shoal of minnows was still in the sandy eddy

from which I had taken the others, some pecking at overhanging grasses, others catching and mouthing floating trifles, ejecting them again when done with. There were strong ones doing fancy tricks that weaker ones tried in vain to emulate. I did my best to induce the lady to take the rod and help herself to minnows, but she sat down on the grass, folded her hands, and said, 'If you don't mind I would prefer to sit and watch.'

The nervous tension caused by all and sundry of these circumstances so magnified the importance of success that it could scarcely have been greater had I been trying a second cast over a salmon that had been rested after a rise. Fancy the ridiculousness of the scene! Here was a loving wife sitting in judgment on her husband's capabilities in the art of angling by his success or failure to catch a minnow. The husband was at full length amongst the high grass with only so much of the arm, that held the two joints of a rod, hanging out over the high bank as might be mistaken for a boy's. My crawling to this position was much approved and elicited, 'Well stalked, Phil.'

The impaled bead of paste was seized directly it reached the water and a fish was hooked; but to get him on the bank—the line being long and the rod short—a good round swing of my arm was necessary. Up it came, and, as I rolled over to follow my swinging arm, I saw the fish continue its flight much beyond the measure of my snare, so I was quickly up and searching the spot where it had dropped. Nell helped and spoke kind words of commiseration, but we did not find the treasure. After that we were partners again; she stood expectant, and each time I sang out, as I rolled over, 'Here he comes,' she watched the flight and captured the minnow.

It was now my turn to wait on a fisher who, full of expectation that the bold biting perch would be waiting her coming, grew quickly astonished at her

float's going round and round the eddy without a sign of interference. To make sure the minnow I had put on the hook had not escaped, she lifted her rod until he came to view, and then the float went on its journeying again until, with patience exhausted, she laid down the rod and asked, 'Why has the pool so altered? It does not seem the same.' It did not, for when we left it, a short half-hour since, the fish were feeding in all directions and the surface of the water was covered with overlapping rings that were frequently broken through by shadows of flitting birds. Now over everything there seemed to have fallen the hush of sleep. I suggested lunch, but curiosity—not mine—insisted on my peeping to see if there were any perch near the hook. I did as I was bid, with my stronger eye focussed through bent fingers, but I could see only one fish, a perch, and that so diseased that in its apparently blind wanderings it had great difficulty in keeping from toppling over to the wrong way up.

'What do you see that interests you so?'

'A poor old humpbacked perch attacked by fungus,' was my reply.

'Let me see,' and so it came about that another pair of arms came next to mine upon the wall to rest a chin on. The cruel parasite showed white upon the gills and fins of its victim and readily attracted notice.

'Oh, Phil, how fearful is old age and decrepitude forsaken; they have all left him. Ugh! What an end! I'd sooner death came here and now while I'm young and cared for, wouldn't you?'

'What's that, Nell? How can we die young when we have been married folk these thirteen years? And how about the bairns, little woman?'

'Oh yes, what a selfish thought! I will not think like that again.'

There was silence for a time; then quite suddenly, 'Thirteen and seventeen are only thirty, sir, and I have

been told I do not look near that age, and that no one would imagine that I was the mother of six children.'

Another time of silence followed and another change of mood.

Our lunch was a happy one, and it was a sweet cigar, so the wife said, that I smoked while she talked and added to her crochet work. Amongst other things, she told me that I was looking better, getting quite a colour, and then, in quite a different voice: 'Why, Phil, you have gray hairs. That's worry and long hours in horrible, smoky London. I wish we had been farmers. What will be the use of money when health is gone?'

I did not answer, for my early rising, with its excitement, the murmurs of the weir, my comfortable position, and the wife's soothing voice, caused me to slip away in sleep. How long I slept or how great the burden of my head had grown the selfish man would probably never have asked, but, fortunately for love's long-suffering, the sleep was broken by, 'Hallo there! Hallo, you fishers! We have brought some tea and cakes. Hallo! where are the fish?'

Our host and hostess as they stepped from the wagonette were in no way an unusual couple to look upon, for they had paired as is the custom, the longest with the shortest. The deity supposed to be responsible for this should be pleased with the result as the love of the six feet three of man for the five feet one of woman was great, while his fair-haired, sweet-tempered, little wife loved every inch of her slim giant with only this reservation—apparently she loved his tallest inches most, for her eyes dwelt oftenest upon his curly head.

Our host's question was answered by my wife's beckoning finger and by her 'Come this way and I will show you.' The new arrivals followed, and the tall one had to bend acutely somewhere about the middle of his height to reach a stout cord which he was told

to haul, 'and you will see what you will see.' As his back straightened a perforated bait-can came up, shed its watery contents, and showed some dozen flopping minnows, one of which I placed upon the perch hook, which I found was bare.

'Oh, give over now; have your tea; and then drive home with us; and you and I'—addressing me—'will shoot a few rabbits.'

I consented to go with him for rabbits provided he would moderate his pace to that of cousin Jim's.

The first half of our tea and cake was buttered with much friendly banter on how we had spent the day and as to the disposal of our fish, and probably the second half would have been so flavoured had not an innocent asked, 'Why is cousin Jim's pace to be adopted?'

The long man coughed, and the short one gave the reason,—

'You must see, ladies, that this elongated man is a good eight inches longer than myself, and I have more than once been sorry that those inches are all in his legs, for I have, when walking standing beans with him, missed easy shots and lost much moisture. I am therefore grateful to Jim's dog for teaching him that, when shooting, the pace to walk up game is that which suits the shortest legs. Jim, who is slightly podgy—I mean it kindly, Jim—and three inches shorter than I, was a sight that moved my pity when he was swinging for a turn, on a certain hot September day, next to George. I knew he would have to give in, but it was none the less pathetic to see him and his dog halt in mid-field. Jim's spaniel was the best-broken dog I ever knew; nothing would cause him to break away, or stray more than a dozen yards for the hottest scent, unless urged to seek a wounded bird, but he was sorely tried by this sudden halt, coming without apparent cause, and when he sat up and saw the man on stilts still going on, he commenced

to whine and howl, fearing his master meditated going home. This proved so startling to the birds that coveys rose in all directions and the field was spoilt. After that Jim's pace was studied and, as a consequence, the shooting much improved.'

I had much more to say but a whirr, some foot in length, and then a longer whirr, told that a fish of some weight was on the line. I am pretty nimble, but the trifling detour round the spread china gave some one else as quick as myself a start, and Nell had the rod before me. We crowded round, and there was some surprise that, even when the fish turned a somersault in the air, I offered no advice. I knew that the slightest chance of a success all her own would be preferable to interference however helpful.

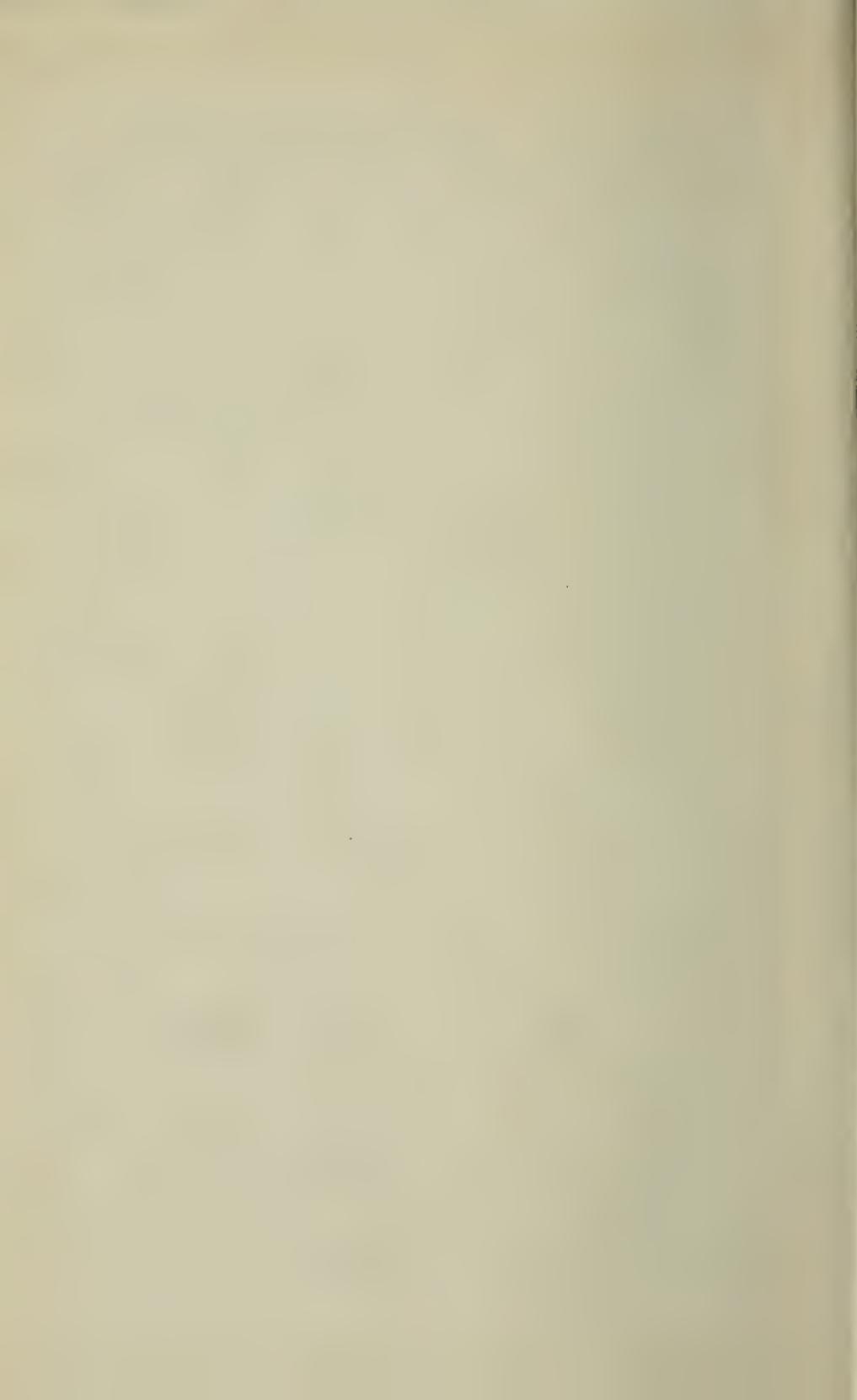
She fought the battle with varying hopes, made acute by the knowledge that it was a trout of seven pounds at least that had leapt so high. To watch the struggle was sufficient to excite hopes and fears alternately. The slack line, so long in coming taut, paled the fisher's face, and then a rush and second leap spun the reel with vigour and flushed her face with hope, and she relieved her lungs with a breath to say, 'I have him still.' Knowing the treacherous bottom to which the fish dug his way so many times, and the slender wrist that held the rod, seconds seemed minutes to me and the battle terribly prolonged.

While I was waiting for a chance to net the fish, he once came so near that I could see the worn slender hold the hook had, and, no doubt, the fisher saw it too, for after that she lessened her opposition to the fish's will. I feared the consequence of this would be that he would seek for safety once again near the bottom, and my hope of ever netting him faded, but, fortunately, he had not sufficient breath remaining to do more than circle round near the surface. There are those who say fish may gain their second breath if given a too easy



Photo by W. K. Geen.

D.S. Where everything seemed perfect.



time, but my experience teaches that a game fish needs little spurring beyond his dread of being held.

Gentle as the handling was, the fish soon after this came on its side and, by a slight strain on the line, was being brought inch by inch towards the net—and in an instant more it would have been in it—when he lifted his head and banged it back in such a way that a loss was certain had not the angler been watchful and dropped the rod point in the nick of time. This movement of the head extended wavelike along the body to the tail and gave an impetus to the oncoming fish that caused it to glide by the net too fast for me to dare to make a try for him, although I knew there was danger of his coming to the bank amongst the overhanging docks and grasses. The angler's efforts told and the line only shaved the tips of the obstructions as the fish made the turn and, in doing so, gave me my chance. I got the bulk within the ring, and, as I lifted higher, the nose and tail slid after the bending body to the bottom of the net.

The salmon has been given without cavil the title 'King of Fishes,' and I think the Thames trout should be crowned their Queen. Was there ever a queen more coy and shy than they are, or one that fought more gallantly for liberty than this one had? No queen was ever more perfect in form or bedecked in more lovely garb—at least so I thought—than the one that lay upon the grass while three excited folk did what might well have passed for a war dance round the victor of the fight.

Flushed and almost breathless with excitement, the happy fisher round whom we capered asked how much the fish would weigh, and, when our host prophesied that it would turn the scale at nine pounds, her pride burst out,—

'Why, Phil, that beats your biggest, doesn't it?'

'Even were that not so, dear, my duty would cloud my memory at such a moment.'

'Shall I box his ears or kiss him?' she inquired of our hostess, who answered,—

'Kiss him, Nell, for his honesty.'

This reward might have been mine had not the giant interfered with—

'Box his ears, Mrs Geen, and give me the kiss.'

This suggestion attracted attention, and we were all in time to see the speaker's chin come up with a snap as if the owner of it was astonished that it should have dropped while he was only thinking. I know now that my friend has a face that automatically puts on a look to fit the occasion. His wife knew it then, apparently, for she said, 'Your innocent face would not save your ears if we could but reach them. Kiss you indeed! had we a ladder we would both mount it and box your ears. But, George, are you not forgetting Wilson? He is there by this time.'

'Oh, yes, I had quite. Now then, you fishers, pack up your rods and come along.'

We were soon being bumped from here to there and back again on the seats of the carriage as the driver negotiated, as speedily as he might, the grass-grown rutty lane that leads to and from the meadows. The high double banks that hedge this old-world road and the rush-grown ditches whence they have been thrown afford splendid hiding-places for artful running pheasants when October comes and the wood is shot. Foxes have a great liking for these double banks, and it was not at all uncommon for Carlo and Dash, a useful couple of Cocker spaniels, to turn one out of them. An aged, yard-hunting, mangy beast that had vexed our host for a long time, had made a home in them, but, although often seen, he could not be trapped or shot. I had seen him break cover more than once and canter off in quite a leisurely way too far ahead to be in any danger.

On a memorable morning I got to the bottom

of the lane by an unusual route before the dogs were put to work, and, as I stood hidden, I could have made a varied bag had it not been determined that nothing was to tempt me but the mangy fox. While the coming guns were still a long way off, I distinctly heard a movement amongst the rushes in the ditch not twenty yards away, and, after a moment's holding of my breath, I saw the big red beast go off with swishing tail. All his side was offered, so I could not miss. I shot him forward and he dropped dead.

My presence proved a stop to a variety of game, and the shooting became frequent as the guns neared the spot where I had stood. Somehow the shooting of the fox, mangy as he was, had lulled my desire to shoot, and I stood some distance from the bank and watched the doings of our host and Wilson. As they neared the end the dogs set up a noisy yapping, and George called out, 'There's a big otter going down the ditch.' This call roused me, and I was prepared to shoot, for I have no love for the cruel beast that eats of his living victim until it dies and then seeks a fresh one. He came my way, and, as he crossed the path to the river, I got a full view and shot him, and more remarkable than this double achievement is the fact that on the same day, in the following year, at the same spot, I shot another otter.

This lane has a reputation, well deserved, for harbouring in its ivy-clad trees, moth-eaten oaks and elms, and sedgy ditches, every variety of feathered creature that visits the Thames valley. November fogs bring woodcock and snipe. Now, as we drove beneath the shadow of the ancient trees, startled rabbits, some so small that only ear-tips were seen above the grass, scuttled across to their burrows.

Mr Wilson was at the stable door, when George and I got there, giving directions to the stableman. On his turning and seeing us he nodded and entered the stable, and we followed. When opposite the

ailing horse, which turned its head as if to listen, he said, 'I don't think there is much the matter, George. I have sent William to get a bran mash with a handful or two of scalded oats in it. I have given him a dose. In two hours' time give him the other. I am coming this way in the morning, and will have another look at him.'

Mr Tom Wilson, veterinary surgeon, farmer, cricketer, and all-round sportsman, is a man of few words, and those so modest that you might not be impressed by them were they not emphasised by every feature of his face. His reputation as a vet. is great, and it is thought that he has no equal as a sportsman in all the country round. There is great rejoicing by the opposing side when his wicket falls, and the pace and break of his deliveries are very disconcerting. He fishes, but it is of his shooting I wish to tell.

I have heard it said that doctors get callous to their fellow-creatures' pains. I do not believe it. Tom Wilson, surgeon to the lower animals, was certainly not so affected by his daily contact with his patients, for it was his kindly thought for their sufferings and his horror of giving them pain that made him so near perfection as a shot. His pity was great for the man who shot wildly into a twirling covey, while he felt something stronger for a thoughtless shooter who could fire at a going bird fifty yards away, and lay claim to having hit it. I have seen him walk a field and not raise his gun when the other shooters have been busy. He told me he would sooner walk all day and not discharge his gun than fire a shot that he could not hope to kill clean with. There is nothing new in Thomas Wilson's theories, but it is a pleasure to see them put into practice in such thorough fashion as his.

'Have you caught the big trout yet?' was his address to me as he shook my hand after his

directions for the horse's care had been given. 'No,' I said, 'and I have given up all hope of ever doing so.'

His look at me was so searchingly professional that I put out my tongue and offered him my wrist. 'You won't find the cause of his despair on his tongue nor in his wrist, Tom,' said George; 'it's in the house. Come in and I'll show you.'

We found the ladies in the dairy weighing the fish, and the result proved the prophet's prophecy so nearly correct that it only wanted two ounces more to fulfil it. Wilson looked sceptical when told who had made the capture and that no aid had been given nor offered. Nell noticed this, and asked,— 'Do you think it so very wonderful, Mr Wilson?'

'Your having caught the fish, Mrs Geen, does not in the least surprise me. I was only wondering how you kept your nerve with these two men around.'

'I had something to do with that,' said our hostess. 'I held on to George's coat-tails or I really believe he'd have gone in.'

'With little risk, I expect; he could walk most depths here, I should think. Well never mind, Geen, there's another whopper waiting for you at Rushey, and, I say, that terror of a pike at Radcot Bridge has thinned another brook of ducklings. Arnold swears he'll shoot the beast if he gets the chance. But I must be off. Good-bye, all.'

I must in fairness take my reader to the pool in which this notorious pike wrought such havoc, and, that he may fish with confidence begot of certainty that he is at the exact spot, I will give a photo of it. But, mind you, this fish, if still alive, has in all probability long since lost his taste for ducklings. Aged pike are all cannibals, and connoisseurs at that, so the surest lure is their nearest relative.

The result of our drive to Rushey with George and his wife for Wilson's trout proved uneventful

as a fishing outing, but a call we made on our home-
ward journey was the beginning of a friendship that
lasted for long years thereafter, to the mutual satis-
faction of all concerned, especially to a boy and girl
who met in consequence of it, and became so concerned
with each other that they concerned themselves about
little else until they had solved the old problem in the
old-fashioned way.

CHAPTER VII

THREE MARRIED COUPLES GO A-FISHING, GET WET,
AND VISIT UNCLE—UNCLE'S LITTLE MISTAKE

AMONG my happiest recollections of fishing outings are those of roaching picnics, the participants in which were three married couples. The exciting feature of these outings was the stubborn contest for the best take of fish, the incentive being the much-prized honour of receiving a pair of gloves paid for by the possessor of the second-best take, while the owner of the least-esteemed catch had to provide two pairs for each of the ladies.

It was the custom for us to call each other by our shortest names—Jack, Ted, and Phil. It is very pleasant to be so called by pretty lips and valued friends.

Jack's uncle owned an estate, which Jack had good reason to hope would some day be his, a part of which is a wealth of rich meadow land, and through it a lovely stream meanders, which in places is narrowed and made crooked by banks that have ancient pollard withies dotted here and there, one of which has a wide opening that shows its empty inside, wherein you might shelter from a storm, while its shoots, grown to hurdle-making size, still give grateful shade or shelter to the fisher who would try the eddying water at its roots.

Every bend has a pool, and in some of them the water eddies quite bustlingly where the stream strikes its outer edge, while near the bank it goes in amongst the sedge and rush with scarce a breath of movement. It gurgles and tumbles through the sluice gates, eddies and foams at the tail of the pool there, and then

glides off smoothly, carrying with it tenderly the newly made flecks of foam.

It is the never-ending variety of features that our rivers have that fascinates and brings back memories of red-letter days 'midst similar scenes with comrades whose faces stand revealed with open lips as if to speak. My memory of those who made up our roaching parties needs no such aid. I see them now crowding round Mrs Ted, who is offering ends of rolled-up papers, the contents of which sent Jack up-stream, Ted down, and left me the middle beat.

Jack was one amongst the many practical fishers of my acquaintance who had no faith in luck : 'Another name for laziness, my boy,' was his description of it; so he was a sticker hard to beat when he settled down with his long bamboo. Although a great favourite with the ladies in the intervals for lunch and tea they deserted him quickly for Ted when the contest was really on, as they could not understand his answers, if answers they got, to their most bewitching notes when once his little red-tipped quill began to travel down his swim.

Ted was very lucky, and believed in luck so steadfastly that he did the silliest things imaginable to give it a chance of happening, and, strange to say, luck so often came to him that he was never surprised nor startled but accepted whatever it brought with the utmost coolness as if he had expected it. Ladies were ever welcomed by him; they in no way interfered with his chances, as, at their approach, he laid his rod down so as to hang out towards his float, which was probably going round and round in an eddy, while his winch hung prepared to call him when the big fish which he expected took his hook.

Ted must be given credit that while his anxiety to please the ladies was manifested in so many ways, particularly by his studiously careful get-up, he was equally lavish in his expenditure of time and money

for piscatorial success. It was a delight to him to think he had the best of fishing tackle, and I have seen him beam with delight when a professional fisherman, little likely to be surprised by any ordinary display, has said, 'Never seen such a splendid lot of useful tackle. Cost a heap of money, I'm thinking. Does one's eyes good to look at it. You should see the rotten stuff some of 'em brings into this punt and you wouldn't be disbelieving the big fish they loses.'

My method of bank fishing for roach is not definable by a name, as Jack's and Ted's are, as it does not conform to either the Thames, Lea, or Trent style, and yet it has, so I think, some of the advantages of each. I use a sixteen-foot, light, cane rod, and a line that is only a trifle shorter; thus, while obviating the necessity of disjointing to land my fish, I am enabled to cast well beyond my threatening pole. I can also, without moving, fish well down towards the shallowing end of the swim where the roach are apt to gather if at all alarmed by such disturbance as the capture of one of their number or, as may well be, by a sight of the ever-moving and overstretching rod. When the float is nearing the limit of its journey I check it to give the stream time to raise the bait and take it forward beyond the attachment as it is then, and also when the drawing back commences, that fish are tempted most.

Jack's beat that day included several deep slow runs that suited well his style of fishing. He was seated almost hidden amongst tall rushes with his roach pole, a twenty-foot bamboo, which reached beyond the belt of weeds that extended to near the centre of the stream. His hair-line was of just sufficient length to leave twelve inches between the float—a small porcupine—and the tip of the rod. The float was weighted with four small shot that sunk it to within a quarter of an inch of the surface, and, as it glided along the sparingly baited swim, the rod

followed without the slightest shake so as to be as little disturbing as possible to the fish it travelled over. A short-shanked, round-bend hook, that was easily hidden in a pea of paste, was his favourite, and no persuasion would affect his choice in favour of the more certain hooker—the long-shanked Crystal.

Jack's style did not appeal to Ted, who, lacking in the dogged grit to enable him to sit for hours together holding twenty feet of rod, preferred to roam with one that measured only twelve, fitted with upright rings, an easily-running winch, and a float that carried weight sufficient to be cast to a distance or go long lengths down stream in search of fish. His ground bait did not sink quickly, as Jack's did; it went sailing off to drop pieces here and there along the course the float would follow, and some of it, at times, reached an eddy where it went round and round so attractively as to entice the chub to come from out submerged boughs to fall a victim to the sly fisher who increased his lure to meet their love of mouthfuls, and it was in such fashion that he often beat patient Jack and little less patient Phil.

Unkind folk are apt to say that women do not really love each other, but could they who think so have seen the three ladies walking amidst the meadow flowers with arms entwined they must have confessed that here at least, where love showed so manifest, there could be no room for the envy, jealousy, and uncharitableness so much talked of.

Arms untwined and footsteps wandered, and visits of encouragement were paid to the fishers. My partner was giving ear to Ted, who was never so real a fisher that he could not find time to talk silly nonsense to any listener by the hour.

I have had many proofs that my rod and handy method are much approved of by lady anglers. Mrs Ted has told me that Ted's rod, with its rings and entangling line, is not nearly so nice as mine, and that

she is sure she should never learn which way to turn his winch, so no wonder that when sporting instincts moved her she should come to fish with mine again. I cannot portray her pretty face and pretty way when giving her command with tutored voice and gesture:—

Give me mine angle. We'll to the river. There
My music playing far off, I will betray
Tawny-finned fishes; my bended hooks shall pierce
Their slimy jaws: and as I draw them up
I'll think them every one an Antony
And say, 'Ah, Ah! you're caught.'

There was grace in her every movement; even the strike in response to the disappearing float was as if her wrist were trained, and the skill of playing what she hooked was all her own. Mrs Ted is a real talker, and for half an hour or more on this occasion the matter of her conversation and the music of her voice, together with her pretty attitudes, were most fascinating, but, strange to say, it suddenly came to both of us to be dodging for a chance to get a look to where Ted should be a-fishing. No male can ever hope to attain to the advantages that females enjoy in the matter of seeing perfectly over either shoulder without visible movement of their head or even the pupils of their eyes.

Fickle Ted, who had left his rod to do the fishing, was face to face with my little woman, to whom he talked with tongue and arms with such eloquence and wit that she laughed so loudly that we could hear her, far as we were away; and we saw her step back a little to encourage Ted to use his arms as he loves to do when in full swing with merry talk. 'Ted calls that fishing,' said Mrs Ted, addressing me in a tone that appeared somewhat changed; so, in reply, I told her that Ted had one eye upon his float and was really fishing, but what more I had to say of his cleverness was cut short by the departure of my companion Ted-wards.

Mrs Jack whistles to her dog with such vigour that he returns to her from the full length of the longest meadow, but she can also give the sweetest little whistle to announce her coming to a friend. She came merely to ask how many fish I had, but before she clearly understood that there were four roach and three dace, indeed probably before she knew there were seven in all, she had asked another question, expressed sympathy for my forsaken look, and departed Ted-wards. Unfortunately, when she arrived there Ted's 'turn' was over; the lady for whose amusement he had sparkled so had left him, and he was listening to his prodigal returned.

Lunch beneath the shade of a bushy-headed pollard near a stream that brings a little breeze when the sun is high and gives a golden heat, when the air quivers with visible vibrations as far as eyes can reach, is a joy that should be shared, and is much enhanced when those who share it are three happy couples whose present pleasure is a joint affair.

The three hampers were three secrets to some of us, but there must have been collaboration to produce results that combined so nicely to make the feast we sat at. The ladies had heard, and doubtless remembered, Jack's tale of a picnic where every one brought something that he or she thought would, when opened before the sitting group, be well received.

'The first hamper,' so ran Jack's tale, 'was brought forward, and, amid expectant looks, was opened. The result one might have thought would have been delight to all, for all of those around were lovers of a pumpkin pie, and this one's crust looked perfect; but no one had a smile, and the hush that fell was mournful. The bringers of No. 2 hamper were then asked to show what they had brought, but protested that they would not open it, as their share of that good meal was also pumpkin pie, and there could be no need of two. At that there came an exchange of

looks, and this revealed the truth that every member of the company had placed his hope of bringing a surprise in pumpkin pie.'

There was no superabundance of any one confection at our picnic, but a variety, not strictly necessary to stimulate our appetites. Of course Ted was president—he is hard to beat in that position—and laughter was loud and merry, and seemed likely to last well into the afternoon, had I not reminded them there were rods to use and fish to catch. Even then they seemed in no great hurry to move. Jack was anxious to give a tip of an expected boom which was likely to mean profit for him and others on the Exchange. Ted turned to his wife and said, 'Jack and his booms! They're rather like our stage banquets, Kate—not over-fattening.'

'Actors ever know,' came the retort, 'how to play any part in life better than those whose part it really is, and are always confident that they can better their instruction. If you would but follow my advice wholly, Ted, and not in part, as you sometimes do, you would find enough to feed on. When you have made a lucky hit, through lack of confidence you put but little in, and, what is worse, in total opposition to my advice, at the first rise, you part instead of holding.'

'I agree with you, Jack,' said Mrs Ted, 'and when he should have sold he has held, totally against even my advice, until he has had a cheque for a few shillings from the wreck at the wind-up.'

'Better a cheque for shillings,' chimed in Mrs Phil, 'than postage stamps for pence. Eh, Phil? But your experience was cheaply bought. Gambling is better left to experts.'

'Dear, cautious little Devonshire,' said Mrs Jack. 'But, there, you men get back to your fishing now, and we'll pack up to save your time, unless you are content to leave Jack an easy first.'

The hint was taken, and I was soon back to my fishing where five pollards form a willowy crescent, and make the water look dark and deep, as it was there my hopes of fish were centred. Under the aged senior of the five, that struggles on a mere skeleton of skin and crust, my life's partner, after a while, came and sat, working at some trifle and chatting to me; and so, no doubt, the afternoon would have passed had we been the sole occupants of the meadow, but our work was interfered with by a visit that ended in two ladies walking off leaving me baiting a hook for Mrs Ted, who confided to me the highly important news: 'Ted is a regular bear at times.'

Had a fish resulted from each baiting our fishing would have been a great success, but only two had come to bank when a dark sultriness, followed by big drops of rain, caused each lady to seek the partner whose chief duty is her protection. Mine was with me quickly, and, after much persuasion, she stepped inside the hollow trunk against which she had sat earlier in the afternoon, and, when there, I tucked her in, and turned her collar up until nothing below her nose was visible, so I made a peck at that and said, 'If you could only see how pretty you look in that rustic shell you would never want to come out while any one was looking on.' There came a rumbling that was followed by a flash and the tree was empty in a moment.

I see its round bright yellow cupboard now and hear the Devon voice pleading to be taken from amongst the trees. Lightning was her greatest terror, and it would have had to be such love and fear as startles mothers into daring to bring or keep her near trees when thunder rolled. So it was into the open she ran to stand the tempest out, and, while she was there, the lightning flashed and quivered in the darkened sky, and the thunder that followed it, ever more

quickly, was awful when it came straight overhead, but my companion's fears fled at the comforting assurance that, standing as we did, we should fare alike.

The heavy rain had now its will with us, and we were before long too wet for any further outdoor pleasure, and, the remainder of our party having fared but little better, it was decided to call the match finished. The afternoon's sport had not much altered the positions of the contestants: Jack was easily first and lucky Ted second.

Mrs Jack protested that it would be dangerous for us to travel with wet shoes and damp clothes, and that it would be wiser for us to go to the uncle's house for tea and get dried. She and Jack hurried off to give notice of our coming, with the result that their bachelor uncle stood waiting us with hearty welcome, which was graciously responded to by Mrs Ted, who, with him, led the way into a room in which the fire sticks crackled loudly to give further welcome and a promise of drier clothes for our journey home.

It transpired that the partial deafness of our host had prevented his understanding that we strangers were married couples. That this was so we discovered from his addressing Mrs Ted as Miss. Very quickly thereafter that lady found out which ear of the old gentleman was the more useful to him, and with some cleverness managed to be seated next to it at tea. She had the gift and training that enabled her to modulate her voice to the exact key to suit the drum of the most eccentric ear, and so successful was she in this that the dear old gentleman soon ceased to make a trumpet of his hand and was, no doubt, beginning to believe that his hearing had much improved, until Mrs Jack, who had made several ineffectual attempts on his denser ear, resorted to a high pitch which caused her uncle to protest: 'My dear

Alice, I am not so deaf as that ; talk a little lower, dear.'

Mrs Jack tried again to get her informing suggestion home—'You should invite Mrs — to bring her children to spend a day with you, uncle.'

The lady referred to prevented any chance of this being heard by means of a very musical laugh, and, with still a smile upon her face, spoke from her advantageous position, 'Your niece is kind enough to suggest that you should ask me to come and see you again some day that you may show me over your dear old house, and let me see your wonderful cattle that Jack has told me so much about.'

Her hearer's face beamed, and he turned to Mrs Jack, and, while patting her hand, said, 'Quite right, Alice, a very good idea.'

So good did he consider it that he gave the invitation there and then, and added, 'And mind you come soon, my dear.'

'I believe Kate would make an Egyptian mummy turn his head to listen to her,' said Mrs Jack. 'Give her a nod or wink to stay her pace a bit, Ted.' Ted only smiled, and Mrs Jack was thrown back upon her wit. She was in deep thought for a moment ; then nudging her uncle she pointed to her wedding ring and then to Mrs Ted's hand. He quickly turned, and seeing the plain gold ring amid its gemmed companions, started with a smile of mock rebuke that came to a pouting O, and then burst into laughter in which we all joined. We rose from the table, still laughing, the old gentleman's laugh remaining the loudest.

CHAPTER VIII

JACK OR PIKE?—OUR DOCTOR STEALS A DAY—
THE DUCK SHOOT

Is there any one who can say definitely at what period of its life or at what stage of its growth a jack should be deemed worthy to be called a pike? The general answer to this ever-recurring question is, 'Well! I call the little ones "jack" and the big ones "pike."' It must be quite forty years since I was first so answered. I had recently been elected President of a London Angling Society; I don't know why I was elected, but I remember that I gave such satisfaction to a member that he proposed my re-election, and, while doing so, said he felt sure that members generally would agree with him that I had fulfilled the duties of the position to the best of my 'debility.' The roars of laughter that greeted this caused the speaker to be at a loss for the word he desired to substitute, and the suggestions that were showered upon him by his brother members could only make his confusion worse confounded, so no wonder that his next attempt was as funny as his first. He laughed himself.

It was while filling this office that I learnt it to be *infra dig.*, indeed most scathing, to call a brother member's jack a 'pike' unless its size was something considerable. Efforts were made by discussions, resolutions, and amendments to fix a weight that should divide the names. A member, who devoted much time to this fish, suggested three pounds, and that only those beyond that weight should be eligible to be shown in the club-room. A wag killed this, to my mind, excellent suggestion by drawing all sorts of pictures of distress that members would be liable to

were it adopted. He kept the members and, I must confess, the President, in an uproar of laughter, and then wound up with what he was pleased to term the pathetic side of this proposal.

'You go out with your brother members to fish in the pike competition, and what was your excuse at home? Why, of course you can hear yourself a-saying it, "The first prize is a china tea-service, and I stand a chance, dear." What then? Why you gets a jack; leastways, it would have been a jack had you not entertained this resolution, and now what is it? Why, a pike, three pounds two ounces, three pounds jack and two ounces pike; and it's on those two ounces that the china tea-service hangs. Can't you see yourself nursing those two ounces in damp handkerchiefs, one of them borrowed from your chum, that they may remain with you until weighing-in time? They won't, unless a miracle happens. I have heard it said that it's a d——d bad pike that won't increase in weight after capture, and to hear some men talk they continue growing for years after. My particular chum, Banfield, there, for instance; he isn't a big man, but he is the biggest authority, for his size, that I know of on the growth of captured fish; what he has caught have grown by leaps and bounds; but that might not happen to the one on which the tea-service hangs; so don't wait for miracles, keep it in constantly moistened handkerchiefs with its mouth wide open and hope that something will drop into it.'

Men, middle-aged men, and old men, too, grow very boyish by a week's feasting on the sweet imaginings of what may happen on the day for which they have a permit to fish a water where the fish seldom see a rod, and, indeed, where education in matters piscatorial has been so much neglected that the most ancient of them are as innocent as newly-hatched gudgeon. I can see the backward growth towards

youth from day to day even in my doctor, who can hide behind a stolid face the keenest pangs of sympathy and yet gets almost childish in his anxiety for the three dozen dace that are perfectly happy in my bath, where their forms, outlined against the white enamel sides, give promise of much strong hauling of the float.

The glorious uncertainty of the age and size that the voracious pike, which eats up all else, may live to grow to lends fascination to the search for a forty-pounder. I know of one that weighed thirty-eight, but that has been already caught and stuffed, not by the doctor nor myself; it's a bigger one we are after, and we have the permit to fish where it is most likely to be found. Who would not be excited and go up two steps at a time to see if the shoal of dace we are to go armed with are faring well? We got quite skittish and very young, and the attentions we required during the preparations and for the start equalled, if they did not exceed, those demanded by a wedding morning, and the doctor was so much affected that his wife assured me she would be very thankful when he was really off. We were going, at least we thought we were, when a lady patient sent for the doctor and, no doubt, told him she would die if, etc., etc., so our going was delayed until the next afternoon, and we missed 'a tide' that might have led us on to that forty-pounder; instead of which—— Well! I will not anticipate.

I never feel sure of the doctor until the train has started. He was at the station in good time, but I got a fright even then, for when I first caught sight of him he was emerging from the telegraph office, but, as I learnt afterwards, it was to supplement his telegram of the day before, to the keeper, which said, 'Cannot come to-day,' with another saying, 'Coming down this afternoon.'

The man who met us and took possession of our precious bait had a most doleful face, and well he

might, for on the morrow the farmers on the estate were to have their day's duck shooting on the lake. My companion saw nothing in this to prevent our fishing; indeed he showed no alarm until the keeper told us that it would be as well to be on the water by daybreak as possibly we might desire to leave when those shooters got to work.

Some men shine in all positions and are stars in all companies; they seem to glide through every affair of life with the ease with which polished ivory makes its way. I am not so happy; I confess I have often wished myself somewhere else, but I don't remember ever having done so while staying at a country inn. The doctor, too, seems quite happy in the smoke-room, and I don't wonder, as it must be a pleasant change for him to be so near ruddy faces, robust health, and loud, honest voices.

The smoking-room we entered after dinner was so full that my companion, after looking in, turned back, but the chorus of voices that called after him, 'There's a chair vacant, sir,' caused us to carry out our first intention of being listeners to agricultural talk. Efforts were made by our neighbours, on either side, to start a conversation with us, but the market, its prices, seductive offers for unsold lots, and inquiries for sound meadow hay, soon engrossed them, and when these bargainings simmered to a settlement the more general questions, rents and the price of wheat, were talked of in louder voices. Many seemed to think that farming could not be profitable so long as a farmer could buy foreign grain cheaper than he could grow it. Many were of opinion that wheat could not be grown profitably under forty shillings, and there was an almost universal opinion that rents were still far too high. The biggest man in the room, a very big one, smoked his pipe and drank his toddy with the beamiest countenance imaginable, and, although more than once appealed to, only beamed and refixed his

hat. Excitement grew by degrees until the more vigorous speakers thumped the tables and made the glasses and their stirring spoons jump, and every time this happened the big man moved his hat again, sometimes backward, at others forward, until his eyes were almost hidden. A speaker desired to know, with a thump that made all the tables shake, 'What do the Tory party mean by putting a shilling on wheat and then taking it off again? Rents too high, I should think they be, and I should like to hear anybody say they baint.'

I could not keep my eyes from the direction of the curly-brimmed beaver which had moved in answer to every talker; it moved this time into a new position, quite on one side, and this movement seemed to have been noticed generally and taken as a sign that the wearer was about to speak. There was a call of 'Order, order for Mr Watts.' Without rising Mr Watts brought a thick voice from somewhere, many buttons down, that said, 'I've been thinking, and I've thought so before, that the comforts of a glass of grog, or it may be two, gives us a liking for just one more before we toddle, and when we have got to a real liking for it we don't like rents at all. How would it be now if we each settled what rent we should pay instead of Squire's doing it? There be some in this room, I don't mention names, that are pretty warm; some of it in the bank and perhaps the missus a tidy bit in the stocking, who after they had driven the dear old Squire into the workhouse would begrudge to pay the poor-rate.' Then he rose, tugged the creases from his waistcoat, and added, 'Them that's going to the shoot has had enough, and so has them as baint. I be going home, so "Good-night."'

When the doctor is my companion he plans and orders to my perfect satisfaction; he has such a taking way, especially with women-folk, that he gets all he asks for. Had it been my duty to have ordered

breakfast to be ready an hour before the first cock-crow I should have approached the subject with whispering humbleness, and then very probably have compromised by suggesting a later hour. Punctual to the minute, with every requisite in its place, we sat down to a breakfast that would have stood the searchings of broad daylight without a fault being found in it, and the waiting-maid was as spruce as spruce could be, and wore such a pleasing smile that all our compunctions at having brought her from her warm bed so early on a frosty morning fled.

The keeper came for us at the time appointed, and brought in with him the first whiff of the change going on outdoors. His face was red with cold and his hands needed much rubbing, at least I thought so from the lengthened time he rubbed them; but my friend understood the symptoms better and ordered him a glass of rum, and the rubbing ceased.

The first streaks of dawn were rising as we left our quarters, and above our heads, in the spaces between the broken clouds, clusters of faintly shining stars helped to give some light to the startling change the night had brought. Snow had fallen, and whitened house-tops, trees, and hedges; so generously had it come that our footsteps fell noiselessly excepting when we crunched the ice in the hollow places of the road. We stepped out briskly in the uncertain light and were soon at the lake, but not before the still hidden sun had driven the stars away and so painted the clouds that they foretold more snow or rain.

My wonderment at the keeper's readiness to partake of rum so early was lessened, and my respect for him much increased, when I saw that the punt had been freed of snow and was clean and sweet-smelling.

We hastened to commence our fishing; not because we feared the weather; the duck shooters and their time of coming were in our mind. In spite of protests,

I helped to start my friend, as he was unfamiliar with my wire arrangement that I think deceives the pike as readily as fine blue gut, and, at the same time, frees the user from all fear of its being affected by the sharpest teeth.

The materials and method of putting together for the snap I use are so simple and the carrying space needed so small that I think you may like to try it; so I will tell you of it here.

I take with me a dozen double hooks and a dozen treble, all with eyes. The double hooks have a piece of wire attached, one and a quarter inches long, including the loop that ends it, which should be just of sufficient size to slip over the eye of the treble hook, from the eye of which a piece of wire comes to the sinker, eighteen inches, and then a four-feet length from the sinker to the swivel to which the line is to be attached. Do not be afraid for the strength of this arrangement, as the wire has proved strong enough for me to hold and kill hundreds of large spring salmon without ever breaking. I have broken rods and broken lines but never once my wire.

There are some who have a strong preference for a huge, fat, and gaudily painted float, and who delight in watching the bobs and little waves it makes as the bait tugs at it for freedom, but only a moment's thought is needed to lead one to prefer the longer and more slender shapes that answer readily to the movements of the lure. It is to the bait, by its movements here and there, that you must look to find the pike, therefore its load should clog it as little as may be possible.

The line is a matter of even greater consequence than the float, as one that sinks readily and fouls itself in weeds must stay the progress of the bait altogether. Have a silk line, dyed dark blue, and filled with liquid mutton fat, and it will glide along the surface until the moment comes to strike, and

this you are much aided in doing when you can see where your line is coming from.

'Any sort of rod will do for live-baiting for pike' is quite a common saying, and, no doubt, were I called upon to earn a livelihood by catching these fish I should forgo the using of a somewhat costly rod that gives the maximum of pleasure in favour of a straight strong stick with which I could lift them out quickly. A rod made for the purpose, and the best of these, is the one to have: you will soon forget the cost in the pleasure of its use.

Our man was not so ready to condemn the wire as I have found most of his class to be; even when asked his opinion he opened and closed his mouth twice before he ventured the remark that he was not yet acquainted with it; but he added, with a shake of his head: 'As you know, sir, we have some big uns in this lake.'

The doctor was pleased with his rig-out, and expressed his thanks by saying: 'You are a good sort, my boy.'

I replied that I had often been told that, but so far as I could remember it was always when conceding starts.

'Another word, Geen, and I won't—— Look at my float, old fellow. See it! see it! What does it mean? There's something at it.'

'It means, my friend, that a long dark form with a villainous mouth and wide staring eyes is following your bait and slowly getting nearer and nearer, ready to pounce.'

By this time the float was on its side, and the bait upon the surface, where it fluttered for a moment and then was carried down. The noise the winch made resounded on the dark lake, where every sound was heard with weird distinctness, and when it ceased I could hear the droppings on the water from a tree overhead until again the winch gave another lengthened,

noisy protest against its boisterous use, and the battle which ensued gave me hope that the doctor had a fish on as big as any of those he has imagined when telling me his fairy tales.

'Don't hold on him too hard, sir. Don't risk anything; plenty of time,' said the nervous keeper.

'Are you sure your wire will hold, Geen?'

'Hold?—yes. If the hooks but keep their hold we shall soon see what's frightening the pair of you.'

The jerking of the fisher's too stiff rod (I like a more supple rod that clips and never jerks) was lessening the fish's journeyings, and now and then it broke the water with a huge tail that made waves to right and left of it that showed up boldly on the smooth water. I had hoped to gaff it, but the keeper was holding the gaff and looking with firm set mouth to where the fish was circling round making fruitless efforts to get a downward plunge.

The deed is done, and the sportsman is sitting with his hands upon his knees saying something to himself and gazing on the fish that can now only flop its tail near its captor's feet.

'A drop of whisky, old fellow, please,' were his first audible words, and they so startled me that I stared at him until he smiled and winked; then I handed him a flask and watched him help himself to such a liberal dose that I could not help saying:—

'And you are the man that has caused me to say "no" and "no" and "no" when a salmon has lain upon the grass, by preaching to me that spirits were poison, and deadly poison before lunch, and now you call for it because you have caught a pike.'

'You don't understand, Geen. I am not taking this stuff because I have caught a fish but because the catching of it has made me need it; unless I am content to wait patiently while my nerves shake off their shakiness I must take a little just to stiffen myself, but had I a heart like yours, that does not

know what fluttering means, I should not do so. A tablespoonful more, please, Geen, if you have not put the flask away. I may not catch a fish like that again.

‘Excuse me; if I understand your logic, it’s not because you may not catch another fish like this that you wish for another dose, but because you wish to try for it as quickly as you can.’

‘Put to, Geen, and we’ll start fair. It’s a grand fish. You think it’s twenty three or four pounds, don’t you, keeper?’

‘He’s quite that, sir, but there are some a-waiting that’s twice his weight. I wouldn’t waste time, sir; you’ll be able to look at it again when you get it home.’

‘Do you hear that, my boy? I shall be able to look at it again when I get it home.’

I was too busy to talk beyond asking for one of the largest baits, which I put on a snap and cast it well out, and then handed the doctor his rod. ‘Please don’t waste time, friend; up you get,’ and I gave him a helping hand.

‘Get to work yourself, my boy, catch a fish like mine, and then talk to me that have got a twenty-four pounder.’

I was busy getting ready when I heard him say: ‘Where’s my float gone?’ and, in reply, the keeper hurriedly remarked: ‘It’s gone, sir, and I wouldn’t be surprised——’

The fisher did not wait to hear further, but struck excitedly and with violence sufficient to dislocate a jaw, and more than sufficient to rid himself of the half-pound dace I had put upon his hook, and, when he found his line come too easily in answer to his drawing, he exclaimed:

‘I’m smashed, old man; the beggar has gone off with all the lot.’

‘Did you feel it? Was it heavy?’ were the only

questions that I asked, but I supplemented them with : 'Next time your float goes under, tighten your line and wait until you feel a stronger pull than your bait can give.'

My friend was in great form after the taking of his first fish, and, when he got a second of nine pounds before I had a run, he had much to say. He became quite eloquent on the merits of stiff rods, and wound that subject up by asking me, 'What's the use of a rod that grips if it does no gripping?' and then, without waiting for reply, he turned his attention to my float and tried his best to delude me into striking at its antics.

Fortune came to me just as my companion's tongue was broaching Theory v. Practice. My float, that had cut so many capers, relieved of its load by the rising of the bait, toppled on its side and disappeared. I allowed the fish to draw quite three yards of line and then struck as near as I could in the opposite direction to where it pointed, and, as it continued on its course, I struck again and held to it as tightly as I dared until I felt the fish shake its head, and then I knew he had spit the bait out and was hooked. After a little coaxing the doctor took my rod and confessed, when he had killed the fish, thirteen pounds, that there was a greater pleasure to be got from my pliant rod than from his stiff one. While I was holding his I felt almost sure a small fish was worrying his bait, so I brought it back little by little and, when near, we saw a jack, not more than a pound, trying to compass the centre of the dace with its little jaws. The bait was very little damaged, but I was proceeding to substitute another when the doctor said : 'What! going to change it, Geen? Don't, please. I've never known a jack-marked bait fail to catch a fish. Here, take back your rod and give me mine.'

His belief in teeth-marked baits was strengthened almost immediately, and he did not forget to say, 'What did I tell you?' as he struck in answer to a pull.

At first he thought it a heavy fish, and then a light one as he continued to turn his reel homewards without, as yet, its having given the slightest outward noise. He wound in until his float came to view, near the punt, and deep down I could see first his bait and then the jaw that held it.

'Why, it's a big one,' I said. 'Be gentle with it, the bait is across its mouth.' But the fish had seen us and was off with his prize at such speed as spun the reel with some vigour, and as, when the rush was over, he continued to forge ahead, I told the doctor to give him a good dig. The stroke was given and the angler, having now every confidence in his tackle, held his fish so tightly that it was forced to the surface, where it rolled and splashed. This brought a warning from me, and, almost simultaneously, another sort of warning came from guns and falling shot.

'Don't be frightened, sir,' said the keeper, 'they won't be along here yet; take your time with him. They've come early enough to-day.'

But my companion was a little bit scared, and his third fish, eleven pounds, received but scant ceremony.

The keeper had foreseen there would be need for either watching the shooting at a distance or moving to a pond about half a mile off. The accounts he gave of it decided us to go and try our luck there, but, before we went, we stood behind trees and saw tamely flying ducks drop one by one in answer to a continuous fusillade.

It is a kindly custom that gives the tenants on an estate a day's duck shooting in the home park; and there is, no doubt, much wisdom in fixing the hour of starting at eleven, by which time the early risers have had opportunity to forward many matters on their farms. Some meet quite early at stated points and walk together, make calls for others, do a little business, and inspect each other's cattle; so it sometimes happens that in going forward they have got

'forarder' and ripe to down the duck, no matter the distance or direction.

The farmers were having a grand time; the duck were plentiful and strangely tame, and every bird that rose called forth a volley from hidden marksmen, some of whom fired late as if in gleesome response to the resounding cracks of their neighbours' guns. Drippings from the trees above had long since ceased, so there could be no mistake that what was dropping from them were shots that had come across the water, and one of these planted in an eye would be very painful.

The disappointing way in which the birds flew annoyed me until I was quite put out and asked for explanation.

'Tell me, keeper, why don't your duck mount and clear off instead of making flights a moorhen would be ashamed of?'

'Well, sir, you see, thay are a pinion short; we cuts the first joint from one of their wings when they are young.'

The matter thus explained, I had to move. Keen as I am at most kinds of sport, I sicken in a moment at others. What more glorious than a frosty morning's tramp round rushy swamps where at any moment the dogs may give you a chance at duck; and how happy one can be during a long forenoon, without having had a shot, though as keen as Nature intended us to be to put something in the larder! But how can there be pleasure in a sport where the animal has no chance?

We started to try the smaller water, and, while going there, the subject of conversation was guns and accidents. Guns were evidently a terror to the doctor, and I, having witnessed an accident with a gun, have my respect for that instrument most fully developed: when it is in safe hands I don't think of it, but when in a youngster's hands and held in my direction I squirm. The doctor rather liked

the tale of the squire who, on being interrupted during dinner to be told that John Byles, a beater, had been shot, said, 'Oh, give him a rabbit,' and who, on learning that the man was badly shot, said, 'D—— it, give him two then.'

Shooting is a serious business, and there is no room for larks nor negligence; you should be as smart in handling your gun as if on parade and with the general's eye upon you. I would not say that occasion might not arise for a bit of fun where a gun is involved, for I was a witness to a little game of the late Mr T. Hoole when he was station-master at Wraysbury, where the River Colne passes close by. Being a keen fisherman, he had a fisher's eye for the river's visitors, whether they came on legs or wings. There was another official at the station who sometimes disturbed duck, that had come in the night to feed on the weedy shallow, by the clang of altering signals. Now and then, by a stealthy look round with a gun before commencing work, he got a shot. Hoole, ever full of tricks and fun, borrowed from Squire Walker's keeper a decoy, the most natural imitation of a duck that I had ever seen, and, while the shooter was off from duty, fixed it to a sunken peg that had a staple, through which a second cord ran from the bird to a pale of the platform fence.

When the man came on duty he was told that a duck had been seen from the bridge, and it was from there he saw a movement amongst the rushes in answer to the hidden string. He hurried to the station-master, who was looking very innocent, for permission to fetch his gun, and, when he got the answer, 'Yes, you may, but don't be long,' he was off at a run, and was soon back, to find the duck still there. He fired, and in response the bird went under, head first, in the most natural way, to appear again and get another charge of shot and dive again and, after that, to come up again quite lively.

'I've winged him anyway, but, dang it, I have no more cartridges.' With that he hurried to Hoole, asked permission, and ran off home again, to find on his return the bird still swimming quite serenely. Again there was a bang and smoke, followed by a dive, and then some one, no matter who, could not keep his laughter back; then every one laughed and the fun was over. He was the best tempered of fellows, but the question, 'Shot that duck yet, Bill?' never failed to rouse him.

We reached the pond, to find it about two acres in extent, with its sheltered side, next to a plantation, clothed with high rushes, the sight of which somewhat restored equanimity to my friend who had not taken well the enforced leaving of the lake where he had been so successful. He had a long look at his great prize before he followed my lead and cast his bait towards the harbour in which our new hopes were centred. We then stood and smoked, watching our floats gliding and bobbing in such fashion as made us momentarily expect their disappearance. Time disappeared but they did not, so we took our guide's advice and moved higher up, taking our expectations with us. Here we met with sport, and, almost simultaneously, hooked and brought to land captures, which were not, however, fit company for those that lay beside the bait-can. A further half-hour's wait brought only one more, and that, too, so small that we decided on devoting our last hour to the lower end, where we met with that end-of-day success which is so apt to give regrets and cause us to say, 'If we had only come here sooner!'

The snow that had frequently threatened us came in earnest now, but the semi-darkness that it brought did not affect the doctor's luck, for he got two more good fish, between nine and ten pounds each, while I got one of seven, before the time arrived to put up rods.

CHAPTER IX

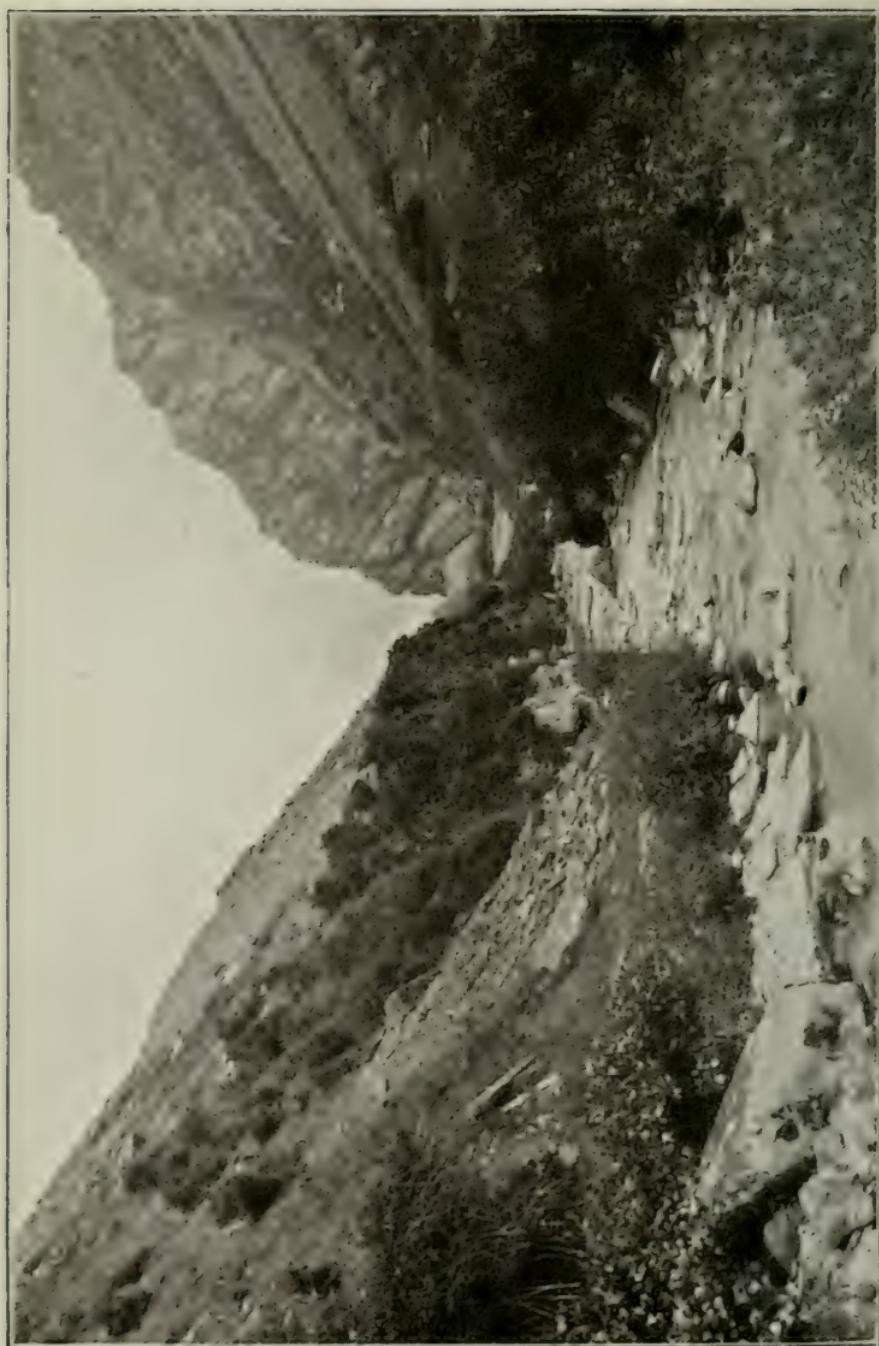
A LEARNED EDITOR AND A CLEVER ARTIST DOWN
SALISBURY WAY FOR PIKE

AT all periods of my life I have been amongst those who have a high esteem for the gifts and responsibilities of those whose talents have brought them to the front in journalistic work, either with their pens or pencils. I have friends that write for papers, and others that draw for them, but up to the day of which I write I had never seen an editor; yet, strange to say, I had the clearest notion, of my own creation, as to what I should see when Fortune should bring me face to face with one.

It happened that one of these friends, very clever with his pencil, asked me to join him in pursuit of pike in one of our kindly landowners' preserves down Salisbury way, but, before the day to start came round, he told me that the editor of *The —* would come with us, and asked me if I could be at Waterloo to catch a certain afternoon train. Unfortunately a circumstance had arisen that would prevent my starting until the morning after, and, when I told him this and it had been arranged that I should find him and his friend near a certain bridge, he offered to take the baits with him, but, lacking in the confidence necessary to trust him with the whole of them, I suggested his taking half.

'But say, old man, supposing you don't turn up, what a fix I shall be in with Mr Editor!'

'And supposing,' said I, 'you take the lot, and, before I turn up, you have sustained your usual loss through one of the many thousands of little accidents that are more likely to happen to you, when in charge



D.S.

Photo by W. K. Givell

Quite near the sea.

of baits, than to any other man I know. Where will your Mr Editor be then? You'll have just one half, my boy, and I wish you luck enough to get them safely to the waterside.'

My friend, while being one of the most unselfish of fishing comrades, is, perhaps owing to his artistic temperament, so forgetful as to be quite unsafe to be in charge of any portion of the necessary impedimenta. He is sure to do something quite early in the day to separate himself from what he will most need; if it be baits he will probably leave them behind, perhaps under the porter's tap, or it may be, he will put them in the train and leave himself behind. I have known him, when on the river, discover that his rods were a mile away.

When we were at A—— a farmer's son accompanied us from the farm to show us where to fish. I am pretty smart at starting when once by the riverside, but it is not so with my friend; he will help to start you if you will let him, and, if not, he will pretend he is very busy preparing, or will have something important to ask the keeper. You have to start first if there is to be a start. On this occasion he talked to the farmer's son until I had hooked a fish; when he had gaffed it, and I urged him to put together, he replied, 'Let me see you catch another first.' After he had gaffed a second he said, 'I think I will begin, Geen,' but he did not until some time after, as he then discovered that he had left his rods at the farm-house.

It must not be imagined that his reluctance to begin arises from the same cause that keeps the newly made sportsman fearsome to fire his gun before spectators, for he is the best caster of a bait and drawer of it to make it twirl that I know. He is quite artistic in his unselfishness, and it lasts throughout the day. When nearing the last live bait he will discover that he would like a little spinning and will put a dead one

on. In spite of this I did not trust him with all the baits.

They, my friend and the editor, successfully dodged the numerous enemies that hover near the artist's bait-can; indeed, it caused no trouble until the jolting of the train splashed water from it that trickled in little rivulets, not towards the nearest door, but away down country, where two pair of ladies' feet hung on ankles that were much in evidence as skirts were drawn up to avoid the coming tides; but the artist's dreamy blue eyes saw only, through the panelling of the coach, the outlines of his next week's sheet, and the editor's spirit was in its editorial chair until the rustle of skirts made him blink, and then fairly stare, at the feet and ankles that hung about.

'Surbiton, Surbiton' in porters' voices woke him thoroughly, and the man for the position popped his head out and shouted, 'Paper! Paper!' and very soon half a dozen sheets were opened and crumpled into cushions for the ladies' feet. The editor is in his element when ordinary men would be gazing blankly for inspiration. To prevent the splashing of the bait-can was to him a simple problem, and was instantly solved by placing his rods from seat to seat and hanging it upon them, and there it hung without a tear, and was soon forgotten in the animated conversation that ensued between the sportsmen and the ladies. No one knows what might have been said before they reached Salisbury had not the handle of the bait-can lost its central bearing and slid until it hung on by a corner and thus emptied itself of its contents, excepting one strong dace which stayed behind to drum in the otherwise empty tin. Fortunately the train was just then entering Basingstoke station, where the editor's voice, calling for 'Paper, porter! Porter, paper!' soon brought to him all he needed for the thirsty baits and for fresh cushions for the ladies' feet.

What happened to the anglers after they left Basingstoke up to their arrival at the farm-house at which they stayed the night I cannot say; but I was told by the artist of the care that had been displayed in providing safe lodgings for the bait.

By driving from Richmond to Surbiton I was able to catch the early morning train. Fairies, good fairies—there were no others in my mother's tales—are the food for children's brains, and they should be fed on them until the old Adam in their blood, that would fill their dreams and imaginings with frightening bogies, has no chance. So fully was I fed on them that to me there has ever been a taste of fairies in all that's good. Some men I know have one always with them that peeps out on the world from the corners of their eyes and prompts their tenement what to say. The cabby that drove me from Richmond to Surbiton had one I am sure, for, without the slightest pother, he not only got me there in time but stilled my anxieties on the way by lifting the trap and sending down cheering messages of our progress. Even when at the station, and he had been paid as was bargained, with a trifle over for his fairy, he would carry my can of bait to the platform.

'I'm a fisherman myself, sir. Had many a pretty take of dace with the fly before they put up the new lock and weir. Good luck to you, sir, and plenty of sport.'

It is very disappointing to me that I should have arrived at such years as mine with my faculty of music so undeveloped that I prefer to be alone when my heart is singing, that I may voice it without offending. If I could only whistle tunefully it would be some relief. The only time and place that seems to suit my voice is when I am in a train that travels fast and with much noise towards my fishing.

When I was in the train, and it was noisily puffing on its way, the cabby's happy face and his kind wishes

came back, while at my feet the dace were flopping that were to be with me on the bank of a river where pike grow quickly to a great size, and, in addition, I was keeping faith to be at a certain spot at a certain time, and I was hastening there.

‘ ‘Tis sweet to know there is an eye to mark our coming and grow brighter when we come.’ I knew that my friend would be glad to see me, though I did not know that both he and his friend would jump for joy when they saw my can of baits.

So I sang, as I have told you, I can, tunefully to the music of a puffing engine and many trundling wheels until I reached my station, where a conveyance awaited me.

The cold of the early morning had by now disappeared with the frosty mist, and as the sun rose higher it lit up and gave a smiling face to the trees and hedgerows, and the birds, having no love songs twittered their thanks for its warmth and brightness. The hedges, full and resplendent with autumn’s many shades of brown, and overhung with berry-laden bushes that had misty pendants in pearly contrast to their brilliant reds, were a wondrous three miles of decorations, with only such breaks as gates, through some of which I caught glimpses of ponds and ditches where the red-tipped withies, swaying with a rising breeze, gave thoughts of the river, where, no doubt, the fishers had come quite early and were having sport, as no jack could be indifferent to a lure on such a breezy morning following on a frost at night.

To my astonishment I found my friend standing idly upon the bridge with some one by his side, both of them with their hands resting in their knicker pockets. ‘At his old games,’ I thought, ‘giving the editor a start while he talks to passers-by.’

I was introduced to the stranger and thus learnt he was a Mr B——, and he by the same means gathered I was Mr G——; but he thought little of my name,

for he called me 'Green' as he hastily lifted the lid of my bait-can, and got some water in his eye from a fluttering tail.

'Splendid lot, Green, splendid. Been waiting here for hours and hours for you. Don't remember ever being so glad to see a man. Lost all our baits in the night.'

'You see, Geen,' said the artist, 'in the little stream close by we placed a hamper weighted with stones, and, while it was held half under water, we put the dace in, tied the cover down and let them sink.'

I asked a question which brought: 'Of course we did, and fastened it to a tree.'

'Well, Geen, when we went this morning to see that all was well with them, the hamper was gone, and where do you think we found it? Why, half a mile away, empty.'

'Yes,' said the editor, 'and we could see the beggars swimming up and down the stream, and we chased them with sparrow-nets until we were tired. Glad you have come; never saw a show go so rotten for want of bossing. Glad you've come, Green.'

With this he took up my bait-can, and saying, 'Come along,' he was off towards the meadow gate.

Some one has said that he believed in ghosts implicitly until he saw one, and, I fear, had I been asked at that moment if I believed in editors, I should have said, 'Implicitly, until I saw this fellow, who calls me "Green,"' and has walked off with my can of baits.' He was in no way like the Apollo of my imaginings; there did not seem enough of him to hold the vast stores of assorted knowledge of the world's doings that editors possess. Nature seems to have endowed the softer sex with guiding instincts in the matter of first impressions, but it's a dangerous weakness in a man to form opinions at first sight. I soon unlearned my first impressions of the man who called me 'Green,'

and, in good time, I came to understand that a wiry frame may be as useful as a large store of bone and muscle in matters intellectual.

It was while slowly following our leader that the artist told me of their wet journey in the train.

On entering the meadow I had time, and only time, to see that to my left there was an unbroken stretch of green, bound in a long distance off with high hedges that had huge poplars in them, which seemed to vie with one another as church spires do to point the highest towards the blue, when a voice called, 'I say, Green, put me on another bait; the one I put on came off at the first cast.'

On looking round I saw that the meadow's boundaries in that direction were finished off by a broad silver hem and on the edge of the glittering water there stood a man that held a rod and called for 'Green.' I put on a bait and saw him prepare to throw. I would have much preferred to make the cast myself, or see my friend the artist do it, as I expected this second bait to follow the course of the first, which I imagined had flown yards beyond the place his tackle went to. The cast was made, and, when I saw the bait rise to the required height and then with a gliding shoot reach the spot desired, I was glad I had not offered my assistance. I saw him gather his loose line preparatory to striking a running fish, I saw him play it, and then concluded that this man had little to learn about live-baiting with a snap.

You cannot make a century from a miss in balk, neither can you cast, strike, and kill a pike perfectly, without much practice, so I was safe in venturing the remark, 'You have done a little fishing before to-day, Mr B——' He smiled, and in doing so lit up a countenance that encouraged me to ask him if it would hurt much to call me 'Geen.'

He laughed again and complied with my request by saying, 'I say, Geen, old fellow, put me on another

bait,' and artfully added, 'I wish I could fix them on as you do.'

I soon gave in to his fascinating ways and we became friends, friends that have gaffed and netted each other's fish in many waters. In the broadest portion of a river where a stately mansion looks down on the fisher's doings we, together with the artist, have spun them out, and lower down, where the river narrows and you can peep into depths so great that veritable monsters would have room to roam some distance up, down or across, and yet be hidden from sight, we have taken many a fine fish. The finest tackle is needed where trout and grayling are so plentiful that the pike grow fat and lazy.

My float went round one of these deep holes perseveringly without the desired result, but the keeper's 'I know there's a big un there, sir,' caused me to stay on and try a paternoster amongst the rushes where very probably the fish was hidden. I must have dropped the lead upon him at my first attempt, as the rushes opened and a muddy swirl came up that told he had moved; so I changed my method back to float and snap and dropped the bait very carefully into the eddying current which took the float away until near the tail where the water shallowed; and there it found the fish, which came towards me with such a dash that I had no chance to strike or even to feel him, but my float was being held under, and I could therefore hope that the opportunity would come by his going from me with the bait still in his jaws. He did so, and the vigour of my jerk and pull caused him to turn back, and I thus lost touch of him for a time; a lengthy time I thought it, during which I held my breath and my brain was busy with conjectures as to what might have given way; but the winch and rod soon solved the problem by gathering in the slack, when the fish, objecting to being held, made a bolt down stream. Fortunately, he hesitated when

on the shallowing edge to determine whether he should leave the pool or not, and this gave me my chance to get clear of the tops of a withy bush that was an obstacle to my following him down. On he went over the broadening shallows with the speed not so much of a hurried beast as of one who hoped to shake off his trouble on his arrival at the pool he was bound for, but the shallowing water through which he had to plough his way, often with tail half out of water, as I held on him from a bank high above, proved too much for him, and he came upon his side when close to the deep, ready spot he had struggled so hard to reach.

His lordship's factor, who stood talking with the artist, appeared delighted at seeing the 'big beast,' as he called it, taken from where only trout and grayling were desired.

That was a very successful day, for the editor had several good fish and the artist nearly as many, but my nineteen-pound fish proved to be the heaviest.

We three once drove in a farmer's dog-cart to a pretty stream with instructions to put the horse up in the workhouse stable, where it would be quite at home, as the owner, being a guardian, often drove it there.

Fish were very plentiful, though small, and the sport kept us so late by the riverside that when we returned to the poorhouse it was a black mass, without a guiding feature, in the pervading darkness, and we were lost outside its surrounding fence until we heard a voice on the other side which, in response to a request for guidance, said,—

'Another lost innocent! can't find your way, can't you? Never been here or anywhere like it before, I'll warrant. Would like to enter by the front gate, being your first visit, eh? Round you go and don't lose yourself. Don't let me miss seeing your innocent

face. Hurry up, keep to your right hand, if they ain't both wrong uns.'

This complimentary invitation was responded to by our ever-ready friend in a brief sentence from a store he keeps ready for emergencies that need a special brand. Tailing off from the dying sound of the energetic one's voice came my loud laughter, which, when joined in by the other two, must have sounded very unusual and evidently untramplike to our unseen listener, as he discovered by it who we were, apologised and came to our rescue with a lamp, and was most assiduous in helping us away with brightly burning lamps that we might not lose ourselves again.

We reached the farm-house safely, and the farmer guardian and his family much enjoyed the literary man's dramatic recital of our reception at the work-house.

Live-baiting for pike is quite a secondary pleasure to spinning for them, but there is a variety of reasons why a live bait is at times preferred, even by those who are fully cognisant of this fact.

In lakes and ponds the largest pike frequent deeper water, are more deliberate in their movements, and require much more coaxing than the smaller ones, so the bait has to be of a larger size and move slowly to give time for the slow rising of a big fish.

In rivers where trout are prized and the pike are regarded as vermin, your sportsmanlike ideas are dulled by the dominating wish to get the voracious brutes out, and the surest method is then adopted; you lay siege to them, in the pools that they frequent, with live baits that will go in search of them with such varied movements that even a trout-full fish grows curious to know what such proceedings mean, and at last curiosity grows too strong and, Eve-like, he takes a taste and pays the penalty.

The delight of roaming and casting a spinning lure

has so many attractions in the change of scenery, and presents such varied opportunities for the display of skill, that the followers of this method are loath to forgo it even for the chance of bigger fish that are more likely to fall victims to live-bait fishing.

When the fish has seized a spinning lure it should be remembered that the bait is being drawn through the water at the time of its seizure by the pike and that a resistance to his will is thus instantly set up; we can, therefore, have no doubt about his redoubling his efforts to hold it securely; so the strike which follows must be a violent one to give any chance of moving the bait, held in such a sharp-toothed vice, sufficiently to drive the hooks home.

The chances of hooking while fishing with a live bait are much greater, for the pike takes it without resistance, holds it loosely or, may be, he is in the act of turning it in his mouth preparatory to gorging it by the time you have gently felt for a taut connection between the fish and rod. When spinning, you may hold hard and strike, a dozen times, only to find that when the fish is near you he opens his mouth and renders back your lure. I have been served thus half a dozen times and still he came at the bait, not having felt the hooks. My method is to strike hard and then, if there is no shake to denote he feels the hooks, to slack the line, to give him confidence to loosen his hold a bit, and then strike again, hoping to feel the shake which tells me to hold him tight that the hooks may be driven deeper between his teeth.

CHAPTER X

HAMPSHIRE GRAYLING—AN UNLUCKY JUMP—NURSING
A GRAYLING AND WAITING FOR THE KEEPER

'HAVE you any engagement for Friday of next week, dad? Mr—— called on me to-day, and, as he was leaving, said he hoped you were well, and then asked me if I thought you would like to have another try for his grayling. I told him I felt sure you would, and that our failure on our last visit would only make you the more anxious to try again.'

'Well, Phil,' I replied, 'it was really very kind of him. I don't think there is any engagement important enough to keep me from going. I am glad you are coming, too, for you may have supposed from our last visit that there were no fish or, if any, that they were few and far between.'

'Oh no, dad; I quite believe the fish are there.'

'I should think they are, my boy. Why, I would give up a day's pheasant shooting for an hour among those grayling. They are the biggest in all Hampshire.'

We are told that grayling were brought to many of our streams by our Friday-fasting forefathers to provide food and sport during the months when the other members of the salmonidæ family are out of season. The wisdom of this step is doubted by many, so far as it affects present-day sport, but I would not part with the excuse to be by the river-side, fly rod in hand, waiting their rising midst the glories of a November morning, when the sun makes its fight, becomes conqueror and drives the mists away, and then, before there is time to see half the pictures that stand revealed, up come the flies to

tempt the grayling to feast so greedily as to fail to see the difference between the imitation and the real. To give this up for the few trout that grayling displace would surely be a poor exchange.

There was many a threat of something happening to prevent one or other of us going, but we came through our difficulties triumphantly, and woke up in Hampshire on that Friday morning within a mile of the fishing. This distance we stepped out to walk with the momentum that joyous expectation gives.

There was a mist upon the river and the adjacent meadows, which seemed from the long distance to be a heavy weight that could neither be lifted nor dispersed (would it turn to rain, and rain incessantly as on our last visit, was my unspoken fear); but, as we neared it, like many another trouble it lessened, and when the sun rose above the wooded heights it encouraged the little breeze that blew up and athwart the stream to have its way in brushing off, first roughly the great bulk, and then quite cleanly the remnants of, the clinging dampness. The wind then breathed with a freer breath and rippled the fast-flowing water into oily wavelets on which the sun played, and everything seemed glad as we travelled upstream full of expectations, I striding my best to keep the pace my companion was making.

From amongst the sedges round an eddy formed by the incoming of a watery ditch, a trail of duck commenced a flight that soon formed into an inverted V, which helped to cut the air and made them look as if on military duty bent. I was still watching their flight when I heard that the plank which had formed the bridge over the ditch was broken down. This determined my journey, for a time, but Phil jumped the watery width and advised my commencing to fish opposite where I stood.

Golden-brown and golden-green leaves, varnished by the night's moisture, glittered in the sun and

fluttered in the breeze, as if with independent life and knowledge that they only waited for a little more of both before fulfilling their mission of decorating and renewing the meadows, which had already put a yellow tint upon their grasses in honour of their coming. Moorhens chattered merrily, two rats swam across the stream in happy confidence, and a midge had a moment's life in which it sailed a yard or two, fluttered, and was sucked into a mouth waiting its morning meal. A grayling, two pounds at least, rose twice while I was putting my rod and line together, but the ditch was a barrier between that fish and me. He rose a third time, as if to show that I had thought too little of his weight, and added quite a pound to my first estimate.

I must jump the ditch. Phil did, and why not I? It is not two months since I walked with him over stubble and through turnips until he tired, whilst I killed quite clean even after lunch. Looking across I saw that the deep boot-prints where he had landed had filled with dark, muddy water, and I remembered that he, having been on the wing while I had been in the centre of the line of shooters, might perhaps have had more occasion to be tired than I. But still, the ditch is not so very wide, I thought: I'll jump and chance it.

I jumped, and was sorry; sorry for the inky blackness that splashed me, sorry for its odour, and sorry for myself; but pleased—in a funny sort of way—to be a source of merriment to my son as I knew I must be when next we met.

I will tell you of my rod and line although probably you have favourites of your own, because there is a chance that you may wish to know what experience has taught me to think the best for such sport as we were after.

The rod is a Hardy, a very old one, of split cane, ten feet in length, and the weight is nine ounces,

six and a half of which are in the butt. I am frequently being told that there are wonderful improvements in the manufacture of split-cane rods, and, on the day of which I am writing, Phil had one that he was very proud of, quite a work of art to look at; but I could not help feeling as I tried it that it lacked something that mine possessed. Could it be the mellowness brought by the twelve years' work that mine has seen? No doubt there are improvements somewhere, because we are told so, and that they are turned out in great numbers with extraordinary expedition I can quite believe; but I am not so sure there can be the same pride in workmanship when the work slips so quickly through the hands.

I have a line, too, I value much, mainly because the rod approves it. You may have seen a horse make noble efforts to gallop gaily with a rider stones too heavy, and perhaps close by another horse carrying just the load—no more, no less—that he was built for; that's how you should fit your rod with the line it has to throw, and that's how mine is fitted. I had a cast of blue gut that tapered off to the fineness of a hair. It had been well soaked, and to it I had attached a fly which I knew would swim erect; yet I tried it several times beyond the spot where the fish that had caused my trouble had risen so boldly. I liked the movements of my fly; it was, too, as near as possible to the midges that now and then came down and were taken by the watchful, greedy fish.

It was a very open spot, excepting for some bushes near the edge, so I crept forward with head well down, slipped a gaiter, knelt upon the leather, made a cast, saw a ring, gave half the time necessary to count one, struck a click from off my reel, and thus commenced a fight with my beguiler.

I let him do the fighting, while I opposed, with such force as was permitted by my fine line, his tugs and digs to get in dangerous directions. I did not hurry

to get him near, nor did I show him the butt, as either of these manœuvres would aid him to get entangled in the bushes just beyond my feet. I preferred to keep him on a steady strain with the rod, at such an angle as would best serve to keep him in midstream until he had fought his fight. Those were my plans, but the fish had others, in answer to which I had to follow him down until I was hidden in a bed of rushes where, while struggling with difficulties, I was glad to hear a voice I knew ask me what I was doing there. With the aid of long legs and long boots Phil parted the screen that hid the river, and then, with a fair field once more, the fight soon ended, and we marched out to more solid ground to view our prize—two pounds eleven ounces. Up to now Phil had been too pre-occupied to see or smell me, but, when the opportunity came and we were face to face, I heard him sniff and saw him look at me. Then his face slowly broadened out with the middle of his tongue filling the opening from which laughter tried in vain to force its way. I was very glad when this first portion of the fit was over, and was much relieved when it sobered down to a wholesome laugh and I could ask him if I smelt so bad as that. ‘Worse,’ was his reply as he started off into fit number two. At last, quite soberly, we went to the river’s edge, and I was cleaned as near as might be, and then, with gear and all, carried back, pick-a-back, across the ditch.

Midges, by this time, were answering the lovely morning’s invitations, and rings in all directions which lost their roundness on the little waves, showed that the fish were eager to avail themselves of their opportunities. The fish were eager and so was that son of mine, for he is at all times as keen as were his sporting forebears, and, to add to it on this occasion, he had his new rod to try, given him by a lady who fishes here, knows what is best to use and how to use it, and who would be likely to ask how the rod answered.

I can answer for that rod, for at times it did more to keep me occupied than my own. The wielder of it protested mildly that he could manage well with his own net, but it grew upon me that he rather liked me to be a witness of the fact that he could cast a fly with or against the wind as bends in the river might demand, could strike the fish lightly, play it with skill, and bring it, with head held up, sliding upon its side to where the net was held.

Success begets such confidence that casts can be ventured between two overhanging boughs, that only inches separate, away on the other side, and the fly made to drop so independently of its attachment as to delude the big fish which has its harbour there, while without the success that nerves the arm you may catch a twig and lose a hook. The sport he had thus far enjoyed without mishap was intoxicating, and emboldened him to make casts from difficult positions to such dangerous spots as showed that he dared misfortune, but of course such daring, when continued, has to pay the penalty by loss; discretion comes afterwards.

By lunch-time we had twenty-one fish, and, success being assured, the standard was raised to a pound and a half. It only required a moment's thought while viewing the two takes to conclude that a dozen of the best would have been a better picture without the others than with them.

We were very hungry, and thirsty too. I know nothing of the miseries of hunger—for which I desire to be made humbly thankful—but I know much of its joys, and the greatest of them is a crust of bread and cheese and a drink of beer, with one eye on half-full creels of November grayling, and the other on the glowing, happy face of a hungry son, who, being in his lusty youth, eats faster and drinks deeper than yourself.

No one that has tried it can deny the soothing

influence of a cigar after an outdoor lunch, and should it have been preceded by good sport, maybe you tell, or listen to, a tale. Now be it known that Phil is my eldest son, and of such an age that he has learnt that sixty-five may have many a tale to tell, and he readily listened while I told him this:—

‘I have put several sorts of rods and lines together here, by the kind permission of the father of the present owner, sometimes for pike that Mr Keeper had failed to snare, at others for roach that had escaped his net. Grayling can be caught with almost any member of the insect tribe that chance has made them familiar with—grasshoppers, worms, and gentles, are deadly baits, especially gentles. Some years ago I was fishing for roach in the eddy just above, while seated and hidden amongst the rushes, handling a sixteen-foot, light, stiff, cane rod that had a brown hair line attached with a small hook that had two gentles on it; to sink the lure there were two medium-sized shot, and to keep it at the required depth was a little bobbety-bobbety float. Prior to making myself thus ready I had cast in a pinch of gentles to whet the appetites of the large roach that frequented this hole; but from what followed I could guess that the roach had had no chance with them. The little round cork float had scarcely time to show me it would cock with its peg uppermost, as bobbety-bobbeties should, when down it went, in such a fashion as said, “This is not a roach.” It was not. I had three grayling out in quick succession, and then got up to look about me and think. I thought, and then put the three fish back, not in my swim. Two swam away quickly, but the first caught showed no sign of life. So I took it out and thought again. I was still thinking when I saw a man and a black retriever, a long way off as yet but coming nearer. Should I throw the fish into the water and look not responsible? No! that man will see something unusual in the water and say

“What’s that?” Shall I hide it? If so, where, that the retriever may not smell it? I have the most obstinate set of brains that will sometimes, when I most need them, desert me utterly. I could do nothing but nurse that fish until the man and dog were within two hundred yards, and then a most brilliant idea came to me. I turned my back on them, wrapped my handkerchief round the fish and put it in my pocket, and then faced about and waited for the keeper’s “Good-morning.” But he added to it: “Any sport, sir?” Now I had not thought of any answer to this most probable question, so I had to think before I could say, “Well, not exactly sport. I’ve had an excitement—I hooked something—but they went away—two of them did.”

The keeper looked first at me and then at his dog, which was quietly enjoying the fact that a cucumber-scented fish was in the pocket nearest him, and, while he looked, a thought occurred to me for which my brains were forgiven all else: “I did not see you, keeper, when I was down here last, so here is a double trifle.” The keeper departed, and I threw the fish into the plantation opposite, which I should have done before had not my coward conscience led me step by step into a stupid fear of that knowing dog.

‘Here comes the keeper, dad,’ said Phil. ‘Talk of a certain gentleman and you’ll see his horns.’

‘That’s just what I told Pat Jennings when I was in Connemara. What do you think he said? “Sure, thin, yer honour, there’s no devil,” and then haltingly, “Begorra, it’s meself that’s not for denying that something walks about on dark nights, but it’s the devil himself that could give the same a name.’

By this time the keeper was with us and seemed pleased at our success. He accepted our offerings, wished us further luck, and would have departed had not a rogue told him what the pocket had held on the day his dog nosed it so persistently. He seemed

relieved; at any rate he drew a long breath before saying, " 'Twas a grayling, was it? Well, well, that bitch could tell me most things, she could; and now she's dead, sir, shot by a London gent who never fired his gun off till lunch-time. Tom and me were saying, "Something'll fall when that gun does go off." Shot dead she was, close at my feet, and Ward—you know Ward, sir—he says, "And a d——d lucky job as it weren't yerself, Jim." I could have knocked the gent down when he fired that gun, but it weren't needed; I never saw a man go so white, and I think he would have dropped had not the governor been quick in getting a gent's flask and giving him the end of it full. If you had heard the governor talk to him you wouldn't forget it; you would have thought that the shooting of that dog was the greatest favour he could possibly have done him, and it brought the man round to a tear or two. I seed them as he handed me a piece of gold, and I thought as a gentleman as could feel for a dumb animal like that wasn't all bad.'

I expressed my regret at his loss, and my son, while impatiently handling his rod, said, 'What a pity!' and then added, 'November days are short and the flies may cease to rise at any moment, so let's be off, dad. I will go beyond the point while you begin where you left off.'

Cleverer men than I say that more is to be done with grayling with an up-stream cast, but, after much experience, I am content with a little up and across, straight across, and across and a little down, all without a movement of the foot. The vibration of our footsteps warn the fish quite as much as a sight of our doings. So keep down, tread lightly, and fish as fine as you may dare while leaving hope of strength sufficient to hold the prize you covet. Try never to forget, though I sometimes do, that there are as many fish near the bank on this side as on the other. Many somewhat experienced anglers throw their fly as if

the fish were all close to the opposite bank, and if for a moment a different thought comes to them, and they make a cast or two without success from a distance back, they will be sure to step as far forward as they can, and persevere with all their might for lengthened periods to reach a spot no more likely to hold a fish than the bit of water over which they are casting animated shadows. It's so much easier and more artistic to drop your fly on the water that curls and gurgles near your bank while showing only the gut and fly. When you must go forward, do it cautiously and grudgingly, searching up and down, with as little of your rod flashing on the water as you can.

Up to this time my one fly had fulfilled its promise, but there seemed a lessening desire to take it, so I chose a red spinner for a dropper, and gave the fish a choice, not only a choice of flies but a choice of movement, for the bob of the dropper is quite unlike and some times far more taking than the movements of the fly that swims, work it as life-like as you may. It was so on this occasion.

Very short was the afternoon, but the sport was glorious while it lasted. It seemed, for a time, as if every fish was making most determined efforts to secure a share of the floating delicacies. At the lip of every pool, just where the water flows over in a quickening movement to meet the shallows, a shoal of fish were making rings that crossed each other, while not infrequently two fish would rise at the same fly. How many we hooked I cannot say, as the majority, indeed there were few exceptions, were much less than a pound and a half and were returned; it was only now and then we got a fish worth a place amongst the morning captures. The fishes' boisterous mood had the most sudden ending. Just as the colourings of the setting sun were thrown upon the water the wind died away, the river brought with it a smoky mist, and the rise of flies and fish was over.

The movements of my son in answer to my whistling looked in the distance like the antics of a funny shadow, but his long legs quickly brought him into clearer sight, landing-net in hand, and, when he saw me packing, he exclaimed : 'Dash it, dad, I thought you had another monster on.'

The homeward pipe was lighted, traps were shouldered, and the hill was faced, from the top of which we saw again, as in the morning, the valley filled with mist.

CHAPTER XI

A FAMILY GATHERING ON THE CORNISH COAST—
BANK HOLIDAY TRAVELLERS

THERE can be but one good answer to 'Where shall the shoots and offshoots of a family assemble for Christmas?' but where they shall forgather for a summer holiday is not easily settled when they are almost numerous enough to colonise a village. It is sometimes difficult to get them together for a lengthy period, but I have found it possible to indulge my taste in this direction and have secured a goodly company, for three weeks at a time, of my sons and daughters, together with the wives or husbands and the children that time has brought to them.

Such holidays linger long in the memory, but I have not to go far back nor to make much call upon my recollections to describe a typical—to me, ideal—holiday so spent.

It was somewhat in the nature of an invasion upon the quiet little cluster of cottages that go to make the village of Porthoustock, near St Keverne, in Cornwall, when the bus from Helston deposited our company of fourteen upon—well! it must be—its main street. Some forewarning the inhabitants had received, and homes had been provided for nearly all of us, so that there was not blank dismay upon the faces of those who had come out of doors to greet the coming of the bus that forms with the Great Western Railway the line of communication between London and Porthoustock. I had secured a roof, bed, and table for a large party, but my happiest guess had been over-reached. The unattached among us, three younger

sons, expressed such sincere willingness to be housed as gipsies, if that would help to solve the seeming difficulties, that their attitude evoked offers of roofs beyond our needs, and we were soon all established in this out-of-the-world dreamland, which has since been described in one of the chief London papers—though no name was given to the place—as an untouched Arcadia. The writer of the articles claimed that he and his comrade 'a famous but, happily, quiet actor' were the only foreigners who had ever visited it. This is surely a compliment to the behaviour of our party during our sojourn there, which was evidently not sufficiently uncongenial to cause the villagers to babble of us to strangers. Please do not suggest that it may have been the shame of having harboured such visitors as ourselves that kept them silent. At any rate the said writer, I must keep his name 'Dark,' and his actor friend, are not forgotten, but are spoken of down there with eager kindness.

I was just indulging proud feelings at the settling of my family when a telegram was brought me from St Keverne saying that two more of my sons would be at Falmouth next morning, by the first train, and asking me to meet them with the *Shag*; so after dinner we had to go bed-hunting again. This satisfactorily arranged, the captain of the *Shag* was interviewed. She lay at anchor in the bay, and a hallo soon brought the captain ashore. Tides and wind chances were considered, and a very early start recommended if we wanted to meet the seven a.m. at Falmouth.

Those of us who elected to go were up at day-break for our first voyage in the *Shag*, a fishing boat which I had hired at Falmouth with her crew—Captain Vinnicombe and his brother Frank.

She travelled well that early morning, and we all enjoyed the nine-mile sail that took us to meet the travellers, who wore a sleepy look that caused me to ask, 'Did you get much sleep?'

'Sleep ! Look at us. But we'll tell you all about our journey down, dad, when we get on board.'

It was a glorious morning, and the breeze was just sufficient to show our little craft off to advantage; when clear of the bay her full sheets gave her a list, and such speed as made her captain smilingly look to the new-comer's faces to see what they thought of her.

In the meantime the mate, who was cook, and every other needed man in turn, had prepared a breakfast which was much enjoyed in spite of difficulties with restless cups and plates.

When the meal was finished both my sons expressed willingness to tell of their journey down, but the younger of the two seemed the fuller of the strange doings of the night they had passed through, and from his recital I think it probable he will do the journey now and then in dreamland. This is his description of it :—

'The difference between our present happy state and the horrors of our journey is so great that it is hard to realise that it is still Bank Holiday and only eleven hours since we took our seats at Paddington.

'Unfortunately for us, Cockneys innumerable had chosen to spend their holiday in the west and to travel by the same train, and to travel, too, with as much pleasure as possible both for themselves and those who might have the gift to appreciate their music and fun.

'Those who came to fill our compartment were eight undoubted Cockneys who displayed an earnest determination to be gay, for, instead of giving signs of a desire to make themselves snug, they took off their coats, improvised a table, and played some game of cards that permitted laughter and uproar unlimited, which continued throughout the night, with only such breaks as stoppages at stations, where tired

porters met with a deal of chaff from the would-be funny men.

'The particularly funny individual of our compartment dropped his hand of cards at times, face upwards, to be at the carriage window whence he addressed whoever chanced to be standing near.

'At Exeter he whistled and beckoned to a porter who, on drawing near, was greeted with :—

“ ‘Moy eye, you’re a good-looking chap by candle-loight. Ow’s yer mother?’ ”

“ ‘Her be all right, I hope, zur.’ ”

“ ‘Ope be blowed. Go ‘ome and ask ‘er.’ ”

'He brought himself back to his cards with a smirk of triumph, and his satisfaction evidently increased when one of the players said to his neighbour,—

“ ‘Ain’t Jaimes all roight? ’E’ll knock ’em a bit, I’ll lay, afore ’e’s done.’ ”

'At Plymouth he ventured at what proved to be higher game in asking a sailor, who held a pillow-like bundle: “ ‘Say, Jack, what dy d’ye maike it in these ’ere parts?’ ” and the reply he got put him out a bit,—

“ ‘Well, it’s to-morrow, if that’s any help to set your compass by. But you’d better luff a bit; you’re too far west already. With a cargo like yours I should make for Stepney.’ ”

'Our funny man was vulgar then, so vulgar that the sailor made a swing of his kit-bag at our now red-faced man as we left the station. “ ‘Jaimes,’ ” as his mates called him, seemed even more ruffled by his reception on his hasty retreat from the window than by his encounter with the tar, but it did not prevent his visiting it again at every stopping-place.

'We were a little sorry for your Devonians, dad, and their neighbours, that no man, as yet, of either county, unless the sailor was a native, had put the noisy man out of countenance, and it was not until we reached St Austell that we found an official

sufficiently awake to give us a taste of West Country repartee. There "Jaimes" put his head out and saluted a porter with,—

" 'Oi say, shoiny face, Lockhart's open yet?'

The porter, evidently fresh from a good night's rest and a refreshing scrub, came forward, and, in a fairly loud voice, replied,—

" 'Can't say, zur, but if you'll let me have your mug I'll see what I can do for un.'

The Londoner was staggered for a moment and then retorted,—

" 'Couldn't trust yer. Yer'd be tempted to change it; and where should I be with one like your'n?'

" 'I'd like to have 'ee out here for foive minutes. I reckon you'd soon be glad to change your face for nigh upon anything.'

" 'Well, I'm blowed if he ain't a beauty. I'd like to git out and have a talk to you, young man.'

" 'Wait a minute, guard, there's a gentleman from Lunnon going to get out here. Any luggage, zur, 'sides yer wit?'

" 'Bring yer 'ed in, Jaimes,' said one of his friends, "he taikes the biscuit."

" 'Jaimes' was silent for a moment and then rejoined,—

" 'Real 'ot un, wasn't ee? But the train was in such a bloomin' 'urry all at once or 'e'd 'ave 'eard sutthink, I tell yer.'

"I have told you nothing of the hundreds of varied noises, to which we had to listen, from other compartments in that long train; I have said nothing about the music; try to imagine it all, and try to imagine the pleasure with which we found ourselves free at Truro.

"I wouldn't go through it again for something, I can tell you.'

The telling of what we had listened to evidently brought back to the speaker the scenes of a long

night of semi-torture, in a cramped position in a crowded third, relieved though it was by language that was sometimes funny and always strange.

The captain of the *Shag* is a short, round man, full of flesh and permeated with humour, and, when he laughs, he laughs all over. He is to be forgiven somewhat for his lengthened laughter for he is minus the advantage that most men have of being able to bend forward and hold their sides to ease up a bit. He can hold his sides, it's true, but he cannot bend forward half enough; he is too round for that. The Plymouth sailor who smote at the Cockney with his kit-bag started the shaking, and the St Austell porter gave it such a further impetus that it did not subside for a period so lengthened that we had grown uneasy long before it ceased. At last, came relief and the words, 'Bravo, St Austell.' But his merriment was not yet over, for he smacked his knee many a time before we reached the little bay of Porthoustock, where our relatives were gathered to welcome us.

Sixteen, all told, is a bunch to provide sport and pleasure for in a village so remote from the world's excitements as the one we had selected. Nigger minstrels, or even a solitary organ grinder, were little likely to find the way to the few cottages that provide homes for the fisher folks and farm hands and look out from a slight indentation in the rocky coast to the dread Manacles—those awful rocks—that have often filled their little bay with wreckage and, more than once, their homes with dead. There is a lifeboat there, but 'Who will man it?' is the question that may occur to strangers. Gathered near the house that shelters it you might see three fisher-looking men, one of whom is the coxswain; you would not suspect it; his comrades have no particularly heroic look, and the remainder of the crew will come from plough or barn when the gun is fired that all Cornish men know is a call for help.

On a high hill about a mile away stands St Keverne,

a fairly large village, whose chief attraction is its church, around which are buried the victims, many hundreds in number, of this treacherous coast. A small slate slab denotes the spot where a hundred and twenty were buried who lost their lives in the wreck of the ship *John*. Within the church is a marble slab which gives the names of the officers that were drowned when the transport ship *Dispatch* was lost, and below their names are stirring lines which tell how by the cruel irony of Fate these brave young fellows, the perils of war, in a distant land, all safely passed, were overwhelmed in sight of home. The most conspicuous monument in the churchyard is a granite cross above the *Mohegan* grave, in which are buried many of the victims of the disaster to that emigrant vessel. It was on the occasion of the loss of this ship that the men of Porthoustock fought so bravely and so well to save life, and succeeded in bringing forty-four safely to land while the ship's boats were all broken against rocks and their occupants lost. I am ready—who is not?—to raise my hat to the brave men who will leave their beds while a midnight storm is raging and go out amongst the Manacles.

That we managed to have a happy, health-giving time in this little, old-world spot was possibly in some measure due to the fact that most of us had learned that :—

From our own selves our joys must flow,
And that dear hut, our home.

We had each brought with us what constitutes our home, and their presence made us joyful with a reasoned joy that fitted in well with the atmosphere of our surroundings and asked for nothing more.

Fishing there was in plenty, but not only fishing. We could find pleasure in our picnics on the moor, so high above the sea that cooling breezes reached us blow whence they would. We drove to pretty

Kynance and to Mullion Cove and to the Lizard, where a day is all too short to visit the quarries in the high, overhanging cliffs from which the 'Serpentine' is taken, and the many other points of interest. The Spanish names above the sheds wherein the 'Serpentine' is turned and polished, and the raven hair and swarthy faces met with there, are very striking, but for really pretty Spanish faces St Ives is the most famous Cornish town. The beauty of its ladies was the excuse of the polygamist of St Ives for having seven wives. This excuse loses nothing of its strangeness if put side by side with that of the Ambassador of Siam who, in answer to the question why he had so many, replied, 'Were the ladies of Siam as beautiful as your ladyship, I could well be content with one.'

The boat at our command enabled us to avail ourselves of days when a sail along the coast or up the Helford River was a pleasant change. Sometimes the sail, with the whole party on board, was to Falmouth, where the ladies desired to do shopping and the children to spend their weekly income in a larger market than that afforded by St Keverne.

It is also a pleasant place to be lazy in, and dawdle an hour or so away amidst a wealth of fern bracken and wild bloom, while the more industrious of the party are gathering the ripe blackberries or following their bent as directed by their hobbies. Our entomologist found a happy hunting-ground, and I was honoured by an invitation from him to be a witness of an 'Assembly.' I was told I should see male moths come from great distances to it, their inducement being the hope of seeing a newly emerged female in all her glory. The newly-born insect was put in a woven cotton cage and hung on a bush in the middle of a field on a hill-side, down which a slight breeze was blowing towards a coppice in a lower distant corner. When this had been done, and no visible results followed

for some little time, I began to fear that the little nephews of the demonstrator would be disappointed, and, just as I had given too hasty expression to this fear, I was told in a whisper that a moth was coming; and then I saw it, and behind it others, most evidently being guided in their course by their noses.

The village, with its snug bay so near to one of the most varied fishing grounds on the coast of Cornwall, must be marked an ideal spot for sea anglers, as we soon discovered.

Our journey to Falmouth to fetch the new-comers was not allowed to spoil our first day's fishing. When the travellers woke from a much-needed sleep, they learned that while they had slept we had taken advantage of the continuing breeze to go for a sail, with spinners out, for mackerel, the whereabouts of which were shown to us by gannets hovering and diving Coverack way. Thither the boat's bow was pointed, and, before the sailors had rigged out their gear—a heavily-weighted, short line attached to the end of a pole running out twelve feet at right angles to the boat, one on each side, with a hand line running out to the other line as a means for drawing in the captive without need of moving the pole—we were in the thick of a shoal that gave every one a busy chance while passing through them. Again and again the captain's warning call came, 'Mind the boom,' as time after time we turned to go back over the fish again. Sometimes the stooping to avoid the swinging timber was so leisurely done that the head was overtaken and its ducking painfully hurried.

The fact that mackerel will take any quivering or spinning lure was that day fully demonstrated. Each of the fishers had on a different bait in the contest for a small pool, to which all had contributed, and the prize was won by the narrowest of margins, the difference between the various takes being, I think, more due to quickness in drawing in and putting out

than to the degrees of attractiveness in the allurements.

On the short journey home we watched the gannet that we had left busy at their sport. It is a strange sight to see them hovering at perhaps 100 feet above the sea, and then, with necks stretched out and downwards, dive with their gooselike weight into the water. The common belief is that they fall directly on the fish that they have marked out for prey; I am more inclined to think that their dive from such a height is meant to take them beneath the shoal and that it is in their ascent to the surface that they seize a fish.

Our captures were a splendid sight, and, on our landing, were shown with pride to those who awaited us, and who expressed their wonder in such length of glowing terms that the children who had crowded round began to fear that they would gain no notice for their captures which they had made amongst the stones in little pools the receding tide had left. Strange creatures, some of them, that they desired to know the names of, but their appeals to father, uncle, and grandfather only proved to them, as children's questions often do, how strangely ignorant grown-up people are.

CHAPTER XII

A NIGHT'S FISHING FOR CONGER, SKATE, AND LING—
A FIGHT WITH AN EIGHTY-SEVEN-POUND CONGER

To start seven fishers off for pollack, with rods and tackle up-to-date, even when aided by three of them having rods and some gear of their own, needs activity to prevent the last boat being late in starting. Such was the task that caused me to leave the table before tea was finished.

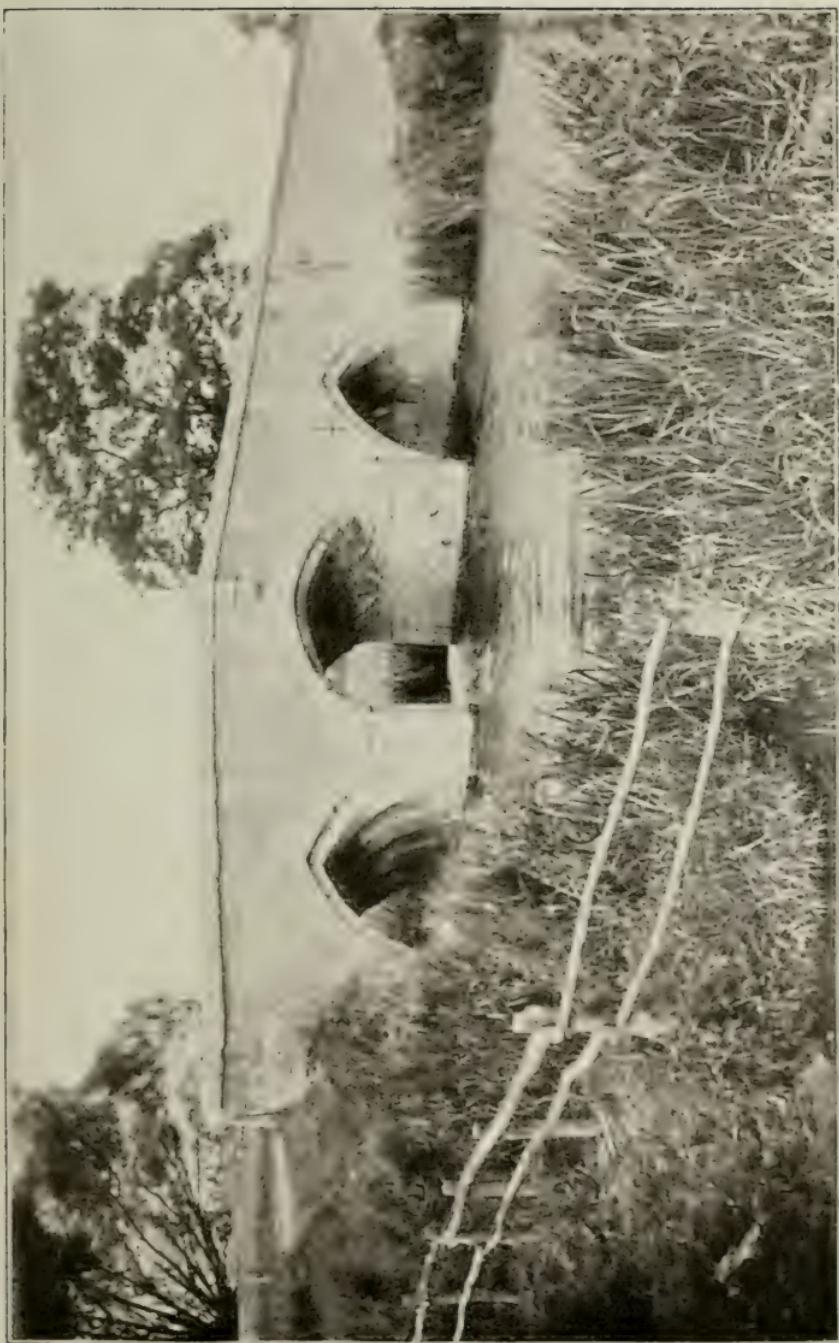
I had engaged an extra boat and men to row it; this was started first; then came the *Shag's* boat with only Frank, the mate, as oarsman. He took two more of the fishers, my eldest sons, anglers of some experience. The remaining three I took aboard the sailing boat, and there set their tackle up, while they assisted the captain to haul his anchor and set his sails to the breeze, which continued fresh enough for 'pollack speed.'

Throughout my long experience the pollack has ever held the prior place in my esteem as the best sport giver of all our sea fishes. I have had many wonderful takes of them, and much pleasure in coaching friends, when these plucky fish have astonished the holders of the rods by the boldness of their feeding and the toughness of their fighting. Yet the evening of which I write made a record in more respects than one, primarily for the loss of tackle, and secondly for the aggregate of fish that the seven fishers took ashore.

My two eldest sons, with their oarsman keeping to the ground where the fish were feeding in a ring of considerable dimensions (within which the shoal of pilchards on which they preyed rose first here, then there, with a flutter that gave a hiss to the surface

The home of the pike that liked Arnold's ducklings.

Photo by W. K. Green.





of the water), for fully two hours worked their will on the greedy monsters that seemed not to care whether their next mouthful was an oily pilchard or a seemingly luscious worm.

The *Shag* sailed as sedately as one could wish, but for an hour or more nothing came to either of my three youngest sons, two of whom fished from the stern while the third was seated in the bows with a heavier weighted line so as to have no need for a length being out that might take his lure back to his brother's lines. The captain, while witnessing the sport his brother was giving, tried all he knew, by keeping as near the rocks as he dared, to give his fishers a start, and his delight was great when a wheel sang out, and a lad exclaimed, 'I've got him.' So he had, for just long enough to say so, and then it was amongst the weeds, and, before the boat could turn, he lost his lead, trace, and lure. The unlucky angler looked sad, or tried to, while I was starting him afresh, but his sorrow did not seem to hurt him so much as did his anxiety for haste when one of his brothers called, 'I've got a bouncer, dad.' The bouncer was more considerate than our first fish had been and showed less haste in getting amongst the weedy rocks; but he got there, taking with him another set of tackle. This loser was too full of the enormous fish he had lost, and what he would have given for a sight of it, to give a thought to such a minor matter as tackle.

The, as yet, untried angler kindly informed his unfortunate brother,—

'You muffed your fish by letting it take line when you should have held to it like grim death.'

'Wait till you get one on like it, if there is another like it in all Cornwall, and then let me see you hold it.'

I could add nothing to this conversation that would be more likely to make those two hold fast to their next fish, so I waited silently.

It was the fisher at the bow that gave me the next
D.S.S.

excitement, and I ventured to sing out, 'Hold to him'; but the answer I got was from the winch, that was spinning off its coils at such speed that, before sufficient additional check could be put on it, the third fish was amongst the rocks and the line entangled there beyond recovery.

'Misfortunes never come singly,' and are very apt to be with you in threes; and then again, 'Misfortunes are never so great but they might be greater,' as I was soon to learn. The two I had started in the first boat came alongside, one of them holding the pieces of a broken rod, and the other with rod erect, but holding in his left hand the end of his running line showing loss, in his case, of trace and worm. There are various ways of giving expression to your feelings at such moments, and there is much that might be said to youths while suffering from their losses, but I have long since learned that but few words are really needed, and that 'What hard luck!' answers best.

At last the untried fisher had his chance; he was fast in a weighty fish whose rush compelled him to give line much against his will, but he gave it only when his rod was bent to a half-circle, and then so grudgingly that the movement of the boat kept the fish from off the bottom. It was a fight that tested the rod, line, and fisher, but it ended in the fish, thirteen pounds in weight, being gaffed and lifted aboard to the joy of its captor.

Dusk came suddenly and with it, fortunately, a moon that increased in lustre, as it was needed to give sufficient light for the steersman to keep clear of the many rocks, whose shapes and positions seemed changed, to me, in the altered light, and to make doubly sure of safety, we kept farther out in deeper water.

Almost as suddenly as the change of light came sport in earnest. Our boats seemed to be in the midst of a great shoal of pilchards that noisily beat

the surface of the water in mad efforts to escape pursuing pollack, which, as mad themselves in the joys of feasting, added to the noise with furious splashes. Into this seething the three fishers let down their 'Natural Spin' baits—lures had been changed at the coming of darkness—and found eager takers. So close were the fish that only a few yards of line were necessary to reach them, and the fishers had the chance of mastering them before they could get back to the depths from which they had risen. This was fortunate, for it happened more than once that the three were struggling at the same time with fish that would need the gaff.

The most glorious moments are the shortest; a cloudy curtain threatened to shut off the grand light the moon was giving, so there was nothing to do but take cheerfully the captain's order: 'Draw in your lines, we must make the entrance to the bay while the light lasts.'

The rowing boats, with their lighter draught and no need for tacking, fished until the changing tide took the pilchards off and the pollack ceased to rise.

Our first day's fishing pleased every one engaged, and the pleasure of the brothers Vinnicombe was added to by permission to take the spoils to Falmouth market, to which they must have started soon after daybreak, for when the early risers went to bathe the *Shag* was gone.

The space to be afforded for this outing—and then there is your patience, too—will only permit me to write of our most successful times with the three principal methods we adopted, and of those but briefly.

It was after many days of trying that we satisfied the captain with our catch of bream; but then nothing less than what would justify his going to market satisfied him. One of these failures was caused by the inability of members of the party to withstand the

motion of the *Shag* at anchor when a ground swell rolled. On another occasion, go where we would, nothing but wrasse and dog-fish resulted. The wrasse, with their almost endless variety of colouring, are, when first landed, a pretty sight, but when they have been in the boat a little time and protrude from their vent a walnut-sized bladder, as they invariably do, they are not so handsome, and, being disliked for food in Cornwall, they did not count with us. Neither did the catch of the destructive, unloved dogfish give satisfaction, unless it was to the sailors while they were dealing out to them sudden death from a short-handled, weighty instrument.

The day for bream came to us at a most opportune time, as two of the ladies had come with us, and we had a store of bait—a dozen mackerel caught at day-break and a basket of mussels brought from the Helford River.

The *Shag* was moored in deep water, between two rocks that raised their weed-covered heads to within a few feet of the surface. The captain with great care gave a preliminary browsing, throwing in chopped crab on either side which sank straight down as far as we could see in this sheltered spot.

Close by, the masts of the *Mohegan* showed where she had sunk after striking these rocks, while a mile shoreward, the huge liner *Paris*, firmly fixed upon the rocks, looked as though she was taking her course down Channel quite near the shore.

In a few lines I will tell you of the tackle required for bottom fishing in these waters, or rather the tackle that I use. A two-joint stiff rod, six feet six inches in length, a large wooden winch, a plaited dark silk line filled with mutton fat and a paternoster that has three brass beams, eighteen inches apart, with twisted gut hooks on them, the last bar to be twelve inches from the lead, which should be of sufficient weight to withstand the tide.

This was put together and the hooks baited and lowered until the ground was felt, and then lifted a foot to keep clear of weeds, when it was handed over to the nervous grip of a lady, who handled it, at first, as if there were danger of its shooting something. The first tug soon came, and with it a cry, 'Oh ! there's a monster pulling at it. What shall I do ? Take the rod, some one.'

The other lady was next equipped, and then four of the men, and business was soon in full swing, with the baiters fully occupied.

Who that has long been a fisher has not had a day of sport that lives in his memory as a time when fish fed as if they had been subjected to famine fare for weeks ? Nothing daunts them when in this mood, and in response to it the angler becomes as hurried in his movements as the fish ; he stays not to trim his bait, but casts it out as long as a shred of food is left upon the hook and ensnares another waiting victim. Multiply the success of a fisher at such a time by six, three rods on each side of the boat ; you will thus get some idea of the bustle that there was on board. Cries of 'Look, look,' 'Oh ! bother,' 'Another bait, please,' went on unceasingly. Any fear of monotony was dismissed by the occasional appearance of a pollack or by the sight of three pretty bream on one rod, tugging in different directions, being gradually hauled from their home, and, in desperate hope, ejecting from their mouths the food which had brought such strange restraint on liberty.

The ladies were long in getting tired, and it was not till late in the afternoon that they left us, by the *Shag*'s dinghy, to see the children and to get some tea. We kept busily at it until some of us, too, were growing tired, and almost welcomed the announcement that the tide was changing and that our fun must end.

The captain and the mate had spoken to me more

than once of the fun to be got from an all-night fishing, and, finding that I was not much moved by recitals of this wonderful sport (I had been through it many times before), they turned their attention to the younger members of the party, and so infected them with thoughts of monster conger, skate, and ling, that at last I was drawn into another experience of it.

Squid is the most toothsome morsel that can be offered to the conger, and its ivory whiteness is so attractive that it is quicker than any other bait in bringing sport; so squid were caught in the gloaming of the night before; and, let me tell you, it may well happen that the catching of this bait will give more fun to youth than the longest and most successful night with conger.

We got a store of these octopus-like fish and started early in the afternoon for the Lizard, with mackerel spinners out, in the hope of supplementing them with the next best lure for deep-water fishing in the night. These we got in numbers, so, when we had anchored, a mile and a half from off the Lizard, our only need was semi-darkness, during which the fish we were after are almost sure to feed.

There was a roll when the boat held, but, fortunately, not sufficient to upset the most sensitive among us, so all were ready when the fun commenced, if fun it be to haul up, hand over hand, from fully thirty fathoms, even the most wondrous fish, upon a line that has at its end a twelve-pound weight of lead, which is barely sufficient to keep the bottom when the Channel tide is running.

As the day was closing in, lamps were lighted to warn passing ships, and soon after that a fisher new to hand-lines commenced to haul with a sportsman's zest at what proved to be a conger of twenty pounds.

When the summer night's darkness came upon us several youngsters' tongues were wagging about their hopes of what they were hauling at, and one

of them had evidently justification, as his line was going, instead of coming, in spite of the help he got by pulling at it at such an angle that he got gunwale help to hold it back. The captain offered assistance, but the fisher desired to fight it out unaided, and showed much pluck until his too soft hands got sore with the rough cord sliding through them, when he was glad to accept the proffered help, and after some further hauling he relinquished what was left to him of the honour in favour of the captain's brother. These two soon decided that it was a big skate, with the tail and its back mooring erect against the tide, that was causing the trouble. This proved correct, as, after much hauling and giving line, a huge, stone-slab-like monster appeared upon the surface, and gave infinite further trouble before it was got on board.

Conger, skate, and ling came in about equal numbers, and I have no doubt had there been more men with sea legs and with horny hands to work the lines the take would have been astonishing, but the increasing roll of the little vessel and the unmistakable hard labour this fishing called for soon killed the keenness of my sons. The eldest held out the longest, but he was finished off at last by a tussle with a conger that almost equalled the doings of the skate, and, as the fisher was handicapped by the tide running at its topmost speed and the extra weight of lead on his line, for a time it was even betting how the fight would end. After the fish had drawn through the sore fingers fathoms of line, encouragement came from some of his brothers with, 'Go it, Phil, never say die,' while others of them had by this time become indifferent to such petty matters. I, too, cared little now, for my sympathies and attention were with the youngsters, who were in distress of another kind. I wanted the anchor up, and was truly glad when at last I was called to see the lengthy, wriggling monster, that was close alongside, ensconced in phosphorescence, and to

wonder how it would be got on board. It was got in safely, and the victor of the long tussle often tells, with as much modesty as he can, of his fight with an eighty-seven-pound conger when the Channel waves ran high.

How glad I was when we were free to haul at the anchor; and haul and haul we did, until it became evident we had not the strength to move it from its hold. 'We must wait until the tide eases' was the verdict of the captain. Another son gave in before I realised that the anchor was in no way necessary to our sailing, and that its cost was paltry in such need as ours.

Sport may be so nearly allied to hard work and so near being minus of any necessity for skill that one or two experiences are sufficient to satisfy. A friend of mine who has travelled the world all over for fishing went to Florida for tarpon, and only fished three days, during which he had great success, and took photographs of his prizes while they were leaping. 'I saw this sport in all its phases, Geen, in those three days and had enough of it.' I rather think that his having a tarpon come at a lure consisting of a scrap of a daily paper was what settled him. The following is his version :—

'I had a grand morning that used up all my bait, and, while my men rowed to another boat for more, I tore up a piece of the paper I was reading, twisted it upon my hook, and almost immediately a fish took it away with a great tug. This happened twice before I got some bait. That was my last day for tarpon, for I thought, if it could swallow what I had been reading, it must be the stupidest fish that swims.'

CHAPTER XIII

FLIES GOOD AND BAD—A DAY ON THE KENNET—
MAC'S OLD FROWN

FLIES are, at times, more to some folk than the progeny of all else that went into the Ark with Noah. They can, and do, raise fishermen to the highest pinnacle of expectation and delight, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, cause them to use such language as leaves them little hope of—of—well! of catching fish. Politics, beer, and racing have much to answer for, their records are bad, especially politics, but flies are an easy first with these. The stag is king of the forest until the all-conquering midge appears, and then, without fight or parley, he vacates his throne. Bulls and lions, Nature's boldest beasts, get up and run when their particular fly commences to serenade. Men of all colours and every clime hope that there will be a time and place in which flies will have no share.

A Scottish friend of mine must have a great dread of these insects, for when a son of his, grown tired of his captures, was about to set some free from their paper cage, he called to him so loudly as to make me jump, 'Na, na, you'll no be loosing them. I'll no be having the beesties in a hoose of mine.'

They are by no means a modern terror, for the great-grandson of Noah, no other than the mighty Nimrod, was so worried by them that he called for the cleverest artificers of his kingdom to build a chamber that would give him a time of freedom from them. It did not answer, so he was really worse off than we are, for there was neither tobacco nor coal tar in those days.

Lions, met unexpectedly by trespassers in their preserves, pale for a moment the face of the bravest man, but what is a little pallor compared to a change from a healthy white man's bloom to the coal-black hue of tar which friends of mine have donned on face, neck, and arms, in deference to Canadian flies?

Nature has lavished her most finished touches on every member of the countless millions that help to make the mighty hum which comes from we know not where. Kings may talk and we are not bound to listen, but the buzz of bog-bred flies commands attention, and the tiniest of them is so armed as to be able to make its presence felt. They are loving creatures that from their first taste of you swear a friendship which no amount of hustling will cause them to forgo. Fortunately for us their lives are short, and they have no reason to complain, for, if appearances may be trusted, they get more enjoyment in their one brief day than the elephant in his century.

It was a happy day they had with me when the high water which lent itself to successful fishing had disappeared, and I was anxiously waiting for the rain that heavy clouds were promising. My two sons were fishing on a small lake, a portion of the river that broadens out, where the salmon and large sea-trout congregate to wait for floods. I was on the bank, where the river ran narrowly, with my rod stretching out through the branches that overhang a deep, gravel-bottom hole in which my worm-baited hook invited attention. This effort at sport was so little exciting that I stretched myself upon the grass, and I must have slumbered, for nowhere could I see the fish I thought I'd caught. 'Morning dreams come true' is a very old saying in my county, and, as if in confirmation of this faith, my rod bent down its point, and there came a little flutter somewhere near my chest as I hastened to see the cause. 'Oh ! drat the flies, and may slimy eels that knot one's lines

beyond unravelling have some one more eloquent than myself to talk to them! Phew! how hot it is in these low-lying highland glens!'

Grass-crowned hills, looking like huge pokes of freshly-made hay, were all around me, and over them fleecy clouds were being hurried, telling of wind above; but not a breath came down. Humid heat rose, from bog and water, and no aid from toil was needed to cause poor me to mop my brow with such frequency that it soon began to smart.

A herd of cattle, unnoticed until then, came scampering by with tails outstretched at extraordinary angles, some quite upright. One poor cow, almost tail-less, was evidently more plagued than any of the others, as shown by the mad pace at which she careered past, wildly kicking, making for a leafy bush into which she backed and waited for her companions.

Then there came a buzzing in my ears, followed by tiny pin-pricks, which hastened the movement of the hand that held the cambric mop until there was a never-ceasing swirl of a damp rag closely dotted with dead midges.

You may clear a space in which to breathe by smoking; but they hover near, waiting to pounce. Yesterday I smoked from morn till night to keep them off, and my tongue was so dried up this morning that I almost vowed to give up smoking altogether, but, on second thoughts, preferred to try myself with a preliminary day or two. So far—it's noon—language is all I have used to drive them off, and, disrespectful as the tenor of what I've said has been, they are with me still. Talking may much relieve our feelings, but it kills no flies. To kill as many as they can gives men no compunction; but what's the good of slaying? Countless numbers sniff the blood and thirst for vengeance. If one only had the patience of Job so as to be able to hold one's hand and tongue in such a case! Then surely a crown would drop from out

the sky to deck the brow of so patient a man, possibly so slight of texture that no human eye could see it, but the little midge would know its meaning and, with a dip, would pass him by.

Where, I wonder, are those millions, which form the scum that covers the river's surface, going? Not where they are often wished, I hope, or another terror will be added to that dread place.

The air was thickened with endless columns, particles of which rose and fell in concerted playful mirth. I must move again. I really think the apertures in which my eyes are fixed must be closing up. This is an awful day, and it is only four o'clock. I can hear a reader say, 'Smoke, you foolish man.'

The reel had made no noise, but I heard a flopping; so I jumped—yes, jumped and ran; to find two rats chasing each other, whether for fun, love, or anger, I did not discover, as they discovered me and dived.

Here comes a man the cut of whose garments proclaims him keeper. I hope I am not trespassing by wandering beyond the boundary line. I was, and had soon to learn it, and his inquiry, 'Have you caught any?' while I was busy with my wet rag killing all I could, caused me to say, 'Millions, man, millions.' This reply staggered him, and he looked at me to see if there was anything strange about me besides my speech. I took it as a compliment that he thought me sane enough to be asked again, 'Have you caught any?' While speaking, he looked and saw my creel was empty. I took off my hat that he might better see the havoc the flies had wrought, and found that its brim was closely freckled with the little wretches, waiting, I suppose, their turn for a vacant spot. That keeper must have been sent by the Fates to tempt me. He smoked and smilingly informed me that smoking kept them off. I was sorely tempted, and fear I should have fallen from my high resolve; but just then my sons

returned to take me in the boat, and we left the river to the flies.

The anglers' joy with flies is sometimes so great that they wait their coming with a patience that they are lacking in for all else. They will smoke away long hours on a river's bank with ears that lengthen to detect a splash, and with eyes opened to their widest for the first ring that shall tell of a rising fish. There's a ring and there's a splash, and then more rings and splashes, and soon the river is as full of life and tumult as before it was dull and lifeless. The May-fly's up, and the fisher's yearly carnival will soon be in full swing.

We, my friend H. G. D. and I, were on the Kennet, with the sole privilege of fishing three miles of the very best of that best of rivers when the May-fly is up. The keeper wired the news, and, as it found us both alive, we were by the river waiting the rise, and had walked its length, so far as our interest extended, and seen fish or tails of fish that when captured would satisfy the hungriest ambition for a monster Kennet trout.

Below the bridge and beyond the long shallow, just where the river begins to deepen before taking a sharp bend, is the home of the oldest patriarch within the keeper's knowledge, thirteen pounds at least. We could see only his tail at first, but now and then the long green banners that hid all else of him would, in their swaying with the stream, have a rent which gave us glimpses of his huge spotted side. There he is and has been these twelve months past without a thought for flies, but presently he will become a victim to the feverish haste that will possess all the other fish to gobble up the luscious drake, which once tasted, all thoughts of moderation go, and, like drunkards, they are not so particular as they were about what they take. Men (some of us) go just as mad about the May-fly, only more so and much earlier. The year's business is so arranged that we may see the

first fly's struggle to free itself from the shell in which it has grown to be so wonderfully perfect.

The keeper, being the most observant, was the first to see a fly, and called our attention to it. 'There's a fly, gentlemen. Let's go back and put the rods together. The rise may be earlier to-day; there are some clouds and a nice breeze.'

So we returned to the bridge for our tackle, keeping well from the river, and here my friend decided that I had better fish below, and he above. 'You go for the patriarch, Geen. I've had enough of him. But, mind, none of your ninnows; the lad you have with you knows all the difference between a minnow and a fly.'

The green drake we had seen must have been an eccentric, for it was two hours before I saw another, and my friend and the keeper were out of sight when I saw the first rise of a fish. I worked hard over it without result, until called a little farther by another rise, where my efforts were equally unsuccessful.

By this time the flies were swarming, and I had a choice among the rising fish. I went for the one that seemed the largest, and the fly behaved so nicely as to deceive a trout, which fought with every ounce of his three pounds, first by two sudden leaps and then by exploring the weeds, thereby testing my cast severely, before surrendering.

The next I hooked would, I reckoned, be a fit companion for the one I had, but it turned out to be a chub of such a size as I should have valued at another time and in another place. My disappointment was of short duration, as I was soon fast in a fish about which there could be no doubt; it rose so close to me that I could see it plainly, and fortunately it was in a pool clear of weeds or I should probably have lost it, as it weighed nearly five pounds and was very slightly hooked.

I will not speak of my smaller captures; I prefer

telling you of my efforts to secure the thirteen-pounder. I was content to watch the spot a while to see if he had yet succumbed to the fascination of the all-fascinating drake. Would he rise? I smoked two pipes at least before a great swirl answered the question and gave me a thrill of hope.

I did all I knew, but it was only the natural fly that he would notice. By this time I was aroused, and had no thoughts but for that particular fish. A natural fly seemed the only chance, and to use it with success I must cross the river and get the breeze behind me. So, round we hastened and got opposite the spot just in time to see him rise again amongst the little waves. While I changed my hook the boy captured flies, and but little time elapsed before I was offering two of them upon a hook. Aided by the wind, I got them neatly to the three-feet circle, whence the patriarch had so far selected all his victims. Two at a time must have tickled his fancy, for up he came, took them, and was back again among the weeds before I had a chance. I got on the greatest pressure that I could as quickly as might be, and this, probably, made him feel the hook, for he made a rush, entangled the line and broke me.

A day with the May-fly is an event all anglers should have a taste of, as the tide of hope is then at its fullest. What my basket might have been had I not courted the prize my tackle did not hold I can only think of, but I know that my friend had a catch of Kennet trout of which he was very proud, as well he might be, for he had four brace, the smallest two pounds and the largest six pounds.

To say 'flies' to anglers is like saying 'rats' to terriers. Their fly-book is more to them than Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, or Kipling, and I fear it is oftener in their hands—even on the seventh day—than the Book of books. A replenished receptacle for flies moves them more than a collection of the successful

efforts of our greatest painters, and, although they may be familiar with the history of every masterpiece, they can put their finger on a fly that gives their thoughts far more vigorous movement than any ancient or modern painting has ever done.

Old friends that have done good service we sometimes take from out their stalls, smooth their feathers admire their every feature, and then replace them with gentle care as we recall the times and places of their triumphs. That old Butcher, whose once gaudy garb is somewhat torn and faded, tells me of a great victory of his when, after being unpardonably overlooked until most other flies had been given a trial, he beguiled a twenty-seven-pound salmon by the taking way he swam while crossing in front of the wouldn't-be-tempted fish.

In the corner of the last leaf of my book there is a feathery fly of many shades of brown that is nameless but highly prized because it is a relic of my faithful gillie, M'Leish. What a length of years following each other without a break we fished together for periods of from four to ten weeks, how we got on and the sport we had, has been told in another book.

At times it happened with us, even in early spring, that the river fell so low that the fish needed much tempting. On one of these occasions, just beyond a black boulder, there were two grand fish, one of which came boldly at a Childers, but, on closer inspection, did not like its looks. Later in the day it rose at a Jock, but did not take it nor either of the many other patterns I showed him on that day. We courted him again and again, and were encouraged in our attentions by the notice he took of every fresh fly we showed him. From this we gathered that we had not put before this epicure what he hoped for. Indeed, it was easy to divine what he told his mate about the many gaudy disappointments that he inspected, and we decided to try Mac's old Brown.

A huge swirl and a tightening line, and then Mac's voice, 'Be canny, be canny, the fly is very old.' By this time the fish had felt the hook, and was off on a long rising rush that ended in a leap in spite of the lowered top. Then came the raising of it again to feel the fish. What an anxious moment when the prize is over twenty pounds ! Shall I feel him or is he gone ? We breathed again and with a stronger faith in the old gut eye that had stood the strain of such a rush and leap. It held until the fish was gaffed, and here it is, the only relic I have, except his gaff (which with his last words he left for me), of my good gillie, Mac.

CHAPTER XIV

NEWS HAS COME—‘THE FISH ARE UP’—I HAVE A MIND
TO TEST MY LINES AGAIN

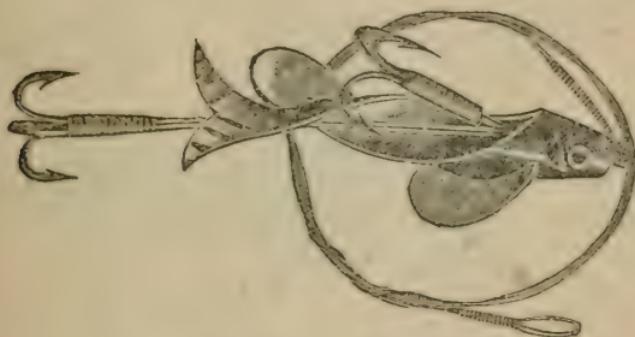
Is there any sport the fascination of which lays such a tenacious hold upon its votaries so long before the season opens as does that of salmon fishing? The tail of the autumn army of fishers has scarcely rounded the bend before there are sounds and signs that tell of the winter angler’s preparations for a start. So entralling is the pursuit of this king of river fishes that right good fellows, who would scorn to mislead others, humbug themselves almost beyond belief merely to justify their getting ready for it.

Preparing for my outings has occupied untold hours during which too pressing matters have been forgotten, and I have been as happy as in those times when I was making sails for dug-out chunks of wood.

You see the ways a fisherman doth take
To catch the fish, what engines he doth make;
Behold how he engageth all his wits,
Also his snares, lines, angles, hooks and nets.”

I think time well spent in making a fly, or working on a thought-out notion that may improve the simplest detail of my outfit, and the attempt to effect such purpose has been a pleasing effort even when failure has ended it. I was quick to discover faults in the tackle of thirty years ago, but slow to learn what would remedy the defects, and, unfortunately, I have to add that I am absolutely devoid of ready-made constructive talent; so, when standing before my bench of tools, I am much more likely to scratch my head for an idea of how to make a start, and, having started,

to have need to suck a bruised finger than to make much progress. A favourite plan of mine is to go from room to room and scrutinise every article that lends itself in shape, colour, or material to the something hatching in my brain. The Spiral Minnow, between conception and birth, a period of quite two years, played havoc with numerous articles of domestic use. On an unlucky day I discovered a length of rubber tubing connecting a gas bracket with my Turkish bath, from which I cut pieces to work with



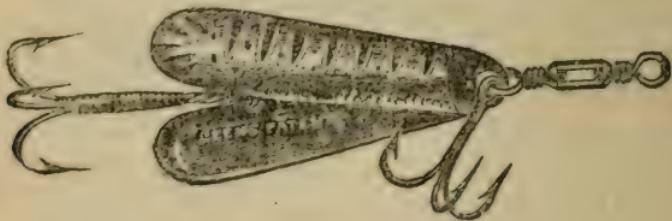
THE SPIRAL MINNOW.

until it became too short for the original purpose it had served; only to find that a length of tubing that is of the same circumference at each end does not lend itself to be made into a section of a fish, which, when spun, will become a whole and, apparently, in a terrible hurry to escape. But I accomplished my end at last with the aid of a grandchild's trumpet.

My first desire to make improvements in fishing tackle was awakened by the loss of a salmon through the breaking of a swivel. The phantom of that day had no swivel, so three or four small ones were placed upon the trace. I wrote to a maker suggesting that a strong, free-working swivel might be made a component part of his famous bait. His reply was: 'I shall be pleased to adopt your suggestion if you will tell me how best to do it.'

I don't remember how many different swivels I made, or the many parts of the bait I placed them in, but at last I pleased myself, and, what is more, I have now the satisfaction of seeing that all phantoms hold a ring between their lips from which strands of twisted gut go back to hold the hooks, and, through a pin-hole in the ring, a pin goes forward, on which the bait spins freely, and thus the need for swivels on the trace is done away with.

Heavy, yellow, waterproof lines were used which were harled across the fish for fifty yards before the bait came to them. It occurred to me it would be better that they should be finer and of a dark colour,



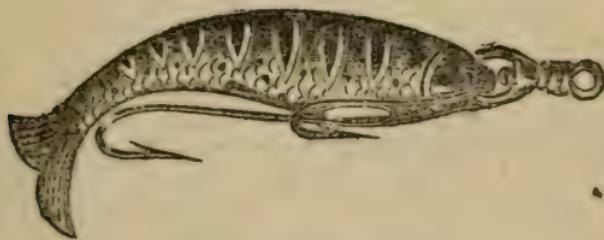
THE SPOON PHANTOM.

and, to prevent their twisting, I made a lead, boat-shaped, with a swivel at each end, to one of which I attached my wire trace and to the other my line, and I felt I had much improved my chances.

The success of the definite Phantom Minnow and of the indefinite spoon, when spinning, made me wish some one would construct a bait possessing the attractions of both combined. To test the effect of a spoon revolving round a minnow was not difficult, but it did not answer, and I ceased, for a time, my efforts in that direction; but, whenever I looked into a window filled with a seemingly endless variety of Sheffield goods, that brightly glistened, the spoon and phantom idea came back to be thought much of again. It was while gazing in a window decked out with these shining goods that an idea came which caused me, Irish-like, to scratch my head to encourage it to continue its line

of thought. How long I kept up the encouragement I cannot say, but it answered, and I said aloud, 'By Jumbo, I have it!' A spectator's smile made me take my fingers from my head and hurry off, but with the Spoon and Phantom as good as made, and since then many a grand fish has fallen a victim to it.

It was a Glen Lyon gillie that prompted me to make quite a new departure in my search for the perfect minnow; he had persuaded himself that the salmon's desire to get at the head of what they seized was an indication that if the bait spun backwards it would be irresistible to a coming fish, and, as the logic



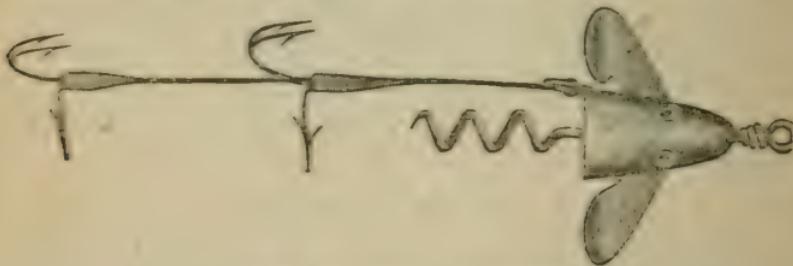
THE NATURAL-SPIN.

seemed good, I spent odd hours enough, before the next season came, to build a hut, in producing a bait which he thought, at first sight, perfect. When the time came to try it I had fruitlessly spun a Phantom and a Spiral in Long Ladder Pool, where there were several fish to be seen straight down from the high rocks above; indeed, M'Leish, my gillie, called to me, 'They're na winking an e'e at ither of them. Try your forward-backward over them, sir.' I put one on and had three casts with it when Mac, throwing up his arms, bellowed out: 'Och! bide a wee; haud it or there'll na be a fush in arl the Glen the morn's morn.'

I must not forget that it was to this clever, ever-smiling, never-discouraged gillie that I owe the notion of a bait which should spin in almost gliding fashion through the water, without the aid of flanges, and it was he who christened it the Natural-Spin.

To get the maximum of sport from a much-fished river a change of lure is needed from time to time, for education and the instinct of self-preservation prompt the fish to decline old-fashioned frauds.

During the past two seasons the sea-lance or sand-eel has been much in favour on the Lyon, but the drawback to its use has been the fact that to shorten it you have to take away its head and shoulders and give it a head that shall cause it to spin smoothly. The one in use worried me, firstly, because it made the eel look all head, and, secondly, the parts constantly became disjointed. In addition to these troubles a lead had to be forced into the body of the fish. Impatient of these difficulties, I tried to make something better,



THE EEL-TAIL SPINNER

and the spinner shown below is the result of my efforts. With it the same sized head as the one cut off can be firmly fixed, as the screw works round the spine, and, what is more, the solid head gives the necessary weight where it is needed most.

Spinning for salmon has seemed very easy to some fishers, who, not having tried it, have given expression to this thought of theirs by telling me of their experiences with fly-rods, and adding, 'So, of course, I should soon be at home with a rod like yours casting a minnow across the stream and drawing it back until a tug is felt.' It is sometimes a little saddening to see an acknowledged expert with the fly fall a victim to his desire to show that this accomplishment of his enables him to speak authoritatively on, and act

proficiently in, what he is pleased to assume the inferior art of casting a minnow.

Lending my rod to novices to make a cast or two was the surest way to vex my gillie Mac into fearful Gaelic until the day on which I told him the tale of the sheep-stealer who, in a dark shed, got hold of a bear instead of a sheep, and, in answer to his impatiently-waiting comrade, who asked, 'Hasn't 'e got 'un?' replied, 'I've got he—and he's got I.'

The general issue of these first casts is that the rod-wielder, accustomed only to overhand casting, has no idea of the psychological moment for loosening his hold upon the line, and consequently the bait takes some direction directly opposed to his intention. It may occur that it will reach mid-stream and there sink amongst the rocks before he has commenced to draw (his experiences have not taught him the need for haste in this), and so he meets resistance from something at which he strikes, and, when it holds, as it most often does, he will probably exclaim, 'See ! I have him.'

It was for such a moment Mac waited to protest against what he considered a waste of precious time. This he did by throwing the gaff upon the ground, thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his knickers, and, while shifting his weight from one leg to the other, humming, 'I've got he—and he's got I.' There was a depth of scorn in this, both for the wielder of the rod and for its owner, which I hope I was the only one to feel. Yet Mac was ever quick after this self-indulgence to cut an ash twig and make a ring of it to put upon the rod to go out and down the line, with the hope that the stream might carry it so that a pull upon the minnow might be made from such a direction as would set it free.

Casting from a reel may be very disconcerting, as was no doubt the case with a most strenuous advocate of this method when, at a recent competition, his

bait persisted in going up a tree far away to the right of the line marked out. I calculated at the time that it would have meant three minnows at three and sixpence each, plus other sundries. Reels do very nicely when the water is broad, pike your prey and plentiful, and the direction the bait may choose to take almost immaterial. I have been told of a winch that is coming which, in answer to the slightest pull, will give the line the utmost freedom for so long as the need remains. That sounds all right, but the maker is slow or his difficulties are greater than he anticipated. It does not seem impossible, this promised perfect winch; so I can only doubt its coming.

How much or how little should we tell our friends of where we get the sport of which we write is a question on which opinions seem to differ. While I may not give such information as would cause the owner of a private fishing who, perhaps, has been generous to me, to be bothered with applicants, I feel somewhat bound to assist my readers to go where I have been, and do as I have done, when the fishing is public or to be purchased.

There are ready unbelievers in what is written, even of fishing, about which it is so easy to discriminate between daylight truth and midnight dreams; therefore I have reason to feel flattered that what I have written has been so very generally believed that I have now to take part in drawings of lots for beats on rivers where before I wandered at will from pool to pool. One Spring some of the new-comers to the Lyon fishing were so fully occupied with studies of a secret nature that it was difficult to get speech with them and impossible for many days—such was their caution—to get an inkling of what they studied. I imagined them great men burdened with matters of such weight and moment that the fishing was but little in their minds, and was very surprised when I discovered that it was my description of the river, on torn-out

pages of *The Fishing Gazette*, in which they were so absorbed. To give advice about fishing is rather an undertaking, for there are fishers to whom guidance is worse than useless, and my descriptions snares, at each and all of which they swear in turn. To lose seven minnows and get no fish, as happened to one of these, almost excused his language.

'It has been an open winter with every chance for salmon to ascend the river, and clean fish have been seen in several of the pools,' is the news that has often come during the second week in January, with the effect of firing the imagination of the waiting sportsman. It is then his memory trots out the doings of days past when early prizes have fallen to his rod and also indistinct shadows of still bigger fish that through some accident, some carelessly undetected flaw in line or faulty hook, have not reached the bank. Then comes a longing to take a peep, just a peep, at the salmon tackle. I know I shall find my hooks free from rust, my winches clean and their bearings oiled, and the whippings of the rods sound and varnished; but a new line may be needed in the event of my really determining to go. I have often had to think I ought not to go, but close on the heels of such thinking has come the thought that it would be a pity to break the sequence of so many years of going, and then, to settle the vexed question, I have confessed that I have always returned extra fit for work. On the occasion of which I am about to write I found myself unusually hard to persuade, and made it in some measure a condition that Phil, my eldest son, should go. He is a busy man, but I talked to him until, to his astonishment, and somewhat to mine, he consented. I gave no chance for a change of mind, but wrote at once to say my son would come to join my friend, Johnson, and myself at the fishing.

The reply to my letter was a great surprise: 'I am very sorry your son cannot fish, as every rod is taken.'

for weeks to come.' This gave just occasion for congratulating myself that I had not made it an absolute condition that Phil should accompany me, as it left an opening to discuss the expediency of my being at the fishing so as to secure for him the first vacancy that might occur.

The glad tidings have come. The river is in ply and there are fish in every pool. It is no mere statement from a casual source that the fish are up; a trusty man has said it; so the fisher's thoughts are of Euston, the north, and the drive from Aberfeldy, which will give a peep of the Rocky and Drumharry pools, both brimful of watery promise. It is best not to laugh at 'watery promise' as it is on the fulfilment of it that your joys must come; water in good volume is the first essential, fish in due season are sure to come; so pray rather for water than for fish. Yet it may be well to caution you that so far as I have gathered it is best to take the weather as it comes and not interfere. 'I ain't going to pray for rain no more' was told me by a professional—a professional fisherman—'for if you do happen to prevail on 'em to start, no prayers ain't going to stop 'em, and yer gets floods and floods.' Still I've sometimes wished I had that man with me in Scotland.

I have a mind to test my lines again; it won't take long, and the extra confidence it will give when the stretching strain of a rushing fish comes to it will pay for all the trouble. It is just this confidence that nerves the arm to master the first Spring fish; and it is so unlucky to lose that fish, and so disconcerting, too.

Why the desire to be so secret in this last unpacking of the packed tackle? My sanctum is in no way sacred to a youth who twiddles new-found down. He does not knock, but comes in unexpectedly with a rush and an 'I say, dad.' He does so now, whistles and withdraws.

After all the pother of preparation there still remains that most fruitful time of happening, the hours between the morning and the evening of the starting-day. Something is sure to occur that needs a telegram or two.

'Cannot go with you. Will write. Johnson.'

'Mr Johnson cannot come for the opening. Will reserve the rod for your son. Stewart. Fortingall.'

So after all I had the further justification for my going that there was a son to coach.

He was the only novice amongst the party on the opening morning, and, in spite of the decision of the rest that it was no use fishing, in the face of the report that there had been a frost and the river was half frozen over, with blocks of ice coming down, he said, 'I shall have a try, and there's need for hurry if the river's going to be frozen over.'

Every one felt a desire to do something, so we accompanied the impatient young man, to be witnesses of his folly; or, perhaps, it was because we were longing to be on the river bank. Phil had practised casting with the tin so little that I was not surprised to see his minnow fly much beyond where he intended, to the ice that coated the water to near mid-stream. With jumps, in answer to the hook's catches in the rough surface, the lure reached the water, and, before it had spun three yards, it was seized, and a fifteen-pound fish resulted. He fought as a fresh-run fish should, and was a picture on the frosted grass, but I think it very probable we old folks and our faces attracted most attention from the gillies, who were hurried off to fetch the idle rods.

It so happened that, on drawing for the beats we should take, it fell to Phil and me to be on different sides of the same stretch, and he went to the falls while I was trying a lower pool. As I came opposite him I stood to watch, and found he had acquired some proficiency in a style of fishing new to him, and was

looking quite likely for a second fish. I advised, with shout and gesture, a slightly slower draw, allowing the bait to sink a trifle deeper in the rushing waters of the falls. This immediately took effect, and he was hard into a fish. He handled it well, too, and kept it under control until, unfortunately, it decided on a journey down-stream. When once it had left the pool the fisher's knowledge of its doings was only to be guessed by him by the merry pace at which the line spun out, for his view of the river was entirely cut off by the impassable rock from the side of which he had made the lucky cast. The line was rightly held to cause it to run over the smoothest part of the jagged rock, but unfortunately, this holding kept the trace along the fish's back, thus urging it on. I have found it best at the beginning of the rush by which the fish means to leave a pool to keep the rod in such position as may tend to bring his head and body sideways. Only a very slight angle is possible at times, but nearly always the fisher can make it sufficient to alter the fish's line of sight, and thereby curb his desire to prolong the rush. It was too late now, had there been a chance, and the salmon had his way, which was down past the Long Ladder Pool, and he was fast approaching the rapid, rocky shoal that must have made a loss inevitable. But by this time I had cast my minnow across Phil's line, and was drawing it towards me, while shouting to him, hidden as he was, to give slack. The fish, wellnigh exhausted, was soon drawn in and gaffed.

Success such as this for each of his two first efforts might make the oldest salmon fisher imagine he was about to break all records, and the new-comer to our ranks probably wondered whatever he would do with all the salmon that would be his before he was through his holiday.

Fishers of great experience have wondered and questioned, 'Why is it that while it frequently happens

that three fish are taken in an hour or so by one or the other of us, only on two occasions—as far as the records show—have four been taken in a day, and that number not once exceeded?' This is one of the many questions incidental to this sport that cannot be answered other than by an inference from what has happened. Captain Hargreaves was the last who put this question to me. He had during the day caught three splendid fish, all over twenty pounds, and he got them so quickly and so early in the day that there was time to catch a dozen more. The answer I gave him was, 'In the first place, Captain, three fish are not very frequently caught in a day. The average is about three per week—half a fish per day—and those who get one a day are very lucky if they are fishing many days. When you get two it is a grand day, and when three there are no words for it or too many. The fourth fish is a miracle that has only happened twice, and to get beyond four would be a miracle that has not happened yet.'

My son's great hopes resulted in four fish in the six days that business permitted him to stay, so very probably during that time his ideas of fishing for salmon varied much. The capture of two strong kelts that so nearly resembled clean fish while in action as to deceive old John, his gillie, who, though eighty years of age and with indifferent sight, can generally say when a kelt is being played, 'I am fearful it's no a clane fush, sir,' lowered his hope a bit, and the two blank days which followed removed any question as to his captures exceeding the number of his friends who would accept a January Tay salmon.

CHAPTER XV

THE GREAT PROBLEM SOLVED AT LAST BY J. D. P.—
SALMON KELTS ARE BOGIES—MY SAILOR GILLIE

'Do salmon feed in fresh water?' has been a too much discussed question these forty years in spite of the fact that more than one learned professor has declared that their doing so is impossible. At last the vexed question is settled and everybody proved almost right. J. D. P. in *The Field* says: 'Examine a mature salmon's mouth, and his teeth will be found to be placed in the apex of each jaw. He has few back teeth, but is furnished with bony jaws, providing a powerful crushing apparatus. The front teeth are used solely in seizing his prey, as evidenced by the salmon's method of taking a minnow from behind and never with the side dash of the trout. Once secured, his prey is passed under the crushing apparatus, whereby he extracts all the juices and goodness from his food. The solid and now worthless material are rejected.' So let it be that they do and they do not. I will forget, with what haste I can, the hooks and worms that in boyhood's days I dug from depths much below 'the crushing apparatus,' that peace may reign. The fact remains that there are days, oft-recurring days, when the fish refuse the juices of the sweetest morsel, and this is testified to by Ronald himself, who told her ladyship from Taymouth Castle when fishing with him: 'There are times when they'll be taking maist anything, and ither times they wouldna tak, they wouldna tak—dang it! they wouldna tak your ladyship.'

Who can give us an unfailing sign by which we

may know a salmon from a kelt? The signs are everywhere on every kelt, yet I cannot find the man who can give me one by which I may know a fairly-mended silver kelt. It's just a problem that must be demonstrated by laying the two side by side, and then the difference will be so striking as to afford an education that you cannot possibly forget, and, for ever after, a kelt, like writing that has become familiar, is unmistakable in every line. Kelts are bogies that have frightened fishers into returning many a clean fish.

One of the cleverest Tay salmon fishers I have met caught two fish in the Tummel, thought them clean until too late to return them to the water, and, liking them less and less after their death, buried them under some bracken, and told me during dinner what he had done, adding: 'I feel sure they are kelts.' I felt sure they were not, or he would have recognised them. Tummel salmon are long and thin and much inclined to favour such mistakes, but the fish in question were unusually well-shaped and the fisher of such repute as to seem beyond the reach of kelt-fright.

It happened quite recently that a Captain's gillie, following closely upon the Captain's heels, brought to the hotel a silver kelt, and so unmistakable to me was the character of the animal that I whispered to the host while yet the fish and fisher were some distance from the lobby. The gillie is a shepherd and knows nothing of the fishing; the Captain is the dearest of good fellows and a happy fisher, catch fish who may; so you can be sure the news of his mistake was broken to him gently. The host referred him to me to ask for some distinguishing mark by which he might know a kelt, so he came to me and said: 'Would you mind telling me how I may know whether a fish is a salmon or a kelt?'

I told him of many signs that would stamp a fish a kelt, but that the first one he caught might have

none of them and yet be kelt all over to those who have once seen clean and unclean fish side by side. What the Captain had done and heard caused him to have such a mighty awe of bringing home another kelt that when, on the following day, he hooked a salmon of thirty pounds, neither its perfect shape, nor its great strength in a fifty-minutes struggle dispelled his fear. So great did the doubt remain that his soldier comrade, Colonel B——, who was fishing on the other side, was asked his opinion; but he could not give one from such a distance as separated them; so they met at the bridge, where they held an inquest and, being still undecided, they came to me. I was wading, and unconscious of onlookers other than my gillie, when he called, 'You are wanted, sir,' and, when I turned, I saw the Colonel, the Captain, and their two gillies, all in fear that the splendid fresh-run fish was nothing but a kelt.

Peter's Pool is the first to answer to a southern wind, and, luckily for me, it was in my beat the day the change came. The salmon had ceased their leaping, and were no doubt as joyful and as full of knowledge of the change as we who viewed the scudding clouds and felt the falling rain.

'Waders, John; now's our chance for fish.'

The smallest minnow and the finest line were soon across the stream, and it was grudgingly, and with as little disturbance as I could to the pebbly bottom, that I travelled down to deeper parts, as there were only a few yards in which I had hopes of fish. The water had nearly reached the tops of my waders when a tug came, which, with my answering strike and the moving of a stone, almost overbalanced me and, to save myself, I scrambled forward into deeper water and, doing so, filled my waders; but I got the fish. John was smiling as he stitched its mouth—they stiffen better so—perhaps at the thought of going through the village with it on his back. When he has

had three to carry he would not let a brother gillie, who had none, share his glory.

Of course I had to have a pipe before trying for a second in so small a space, but as Nature was evidently gathering force for some great outburst it would have been unwise to delay for long. I was fortunate enough to choose the happy time, and weak enough, I fear, to share in John's pride when we got another just at dusk, made earlier by the darkly threatening clouds.

The storm raged late into the night, and, between the blasts, I could hear the patter of the welcome rain that said so plainly : 'The river will be high and full of sport on Monday. Salmon will be hurrying past the netting stations while the nets are off and will soon be here, fresh and innocent, to fall an easy prey.' With thoughts of big ones which multiplied in the haziness of coming sleep, I travelled on to dreams that only ended with the morning's call.

A moist fortnight followed, during which every fisher was made more or less happy. It is a pleasant time when all are pleased and chatty. The river ran just the right height, and the only thought was of fish. The teachings of the Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain, the wealth of the Rothschilds, and the futures of kingdoms were small matters compared with 'What bait did you use to catch those fish?' or with the oft-repeated question, 'How do you manage, Geen, when a fish comes on while the tin is full of coils?' My reply to the latter question has become uniform from repetition. 'Trouble not of what will happen when the fish is on; use all your faculties to get the attachment, the fish will do the rest.'

I am anxious that it should not be inferred from this that I consider myself more clever than most with a salmon; indeed I must sometimes appear a novice, for more than once strangers have offered me advice when playing one. The last time this

occurred I heard a voice from behind telling me what I ought to do if I hoped to land the fish. I looked round to see who had spoken, and got my first glimpse of one of those well-meaning gifted creatures who are always ready to give advice and lend a helping hand. I know a Gaelic word or two, not nice ones, but understood by gillies, which came involuntarily as the worthy man bustled so near me that I feared he meditated demonstrating his knowledge by taking my rod and showing me how to hold it to stop the dashing, leaping fish. The gillies, his and mine, were so seriously concerned that they had to reserve their laughter while they hastened to get below the fish and, with stones, endeavour to stop his downward course to where I could not follow. The new-comer had a better plan; he waded in to beat the water with his gaff, lost his footing, and toppled over with a splash just above the fish, which in its fright went down with such a rush beyond the overhanging trees that I had to hold and break or lose all my line.

But to return to the coiling tin : 'Suppose the fish comes towards you instead of darting off—what then ?'

'Not once in a season will it happen that a salmon, which is so near when hooked that your tin holds many coils, will come so much nearer that the uplifting of your rod from its position when the strike was made will not suffice; but, should it not, take a step backwards or add a coil, or even two, or more. When the fish sees your movement he will run off in earnest and soon be upon the winch.'

It often happens that while talking of the very remote chance of a certain thing happening the very incident will occur. Mr J. C. Pipe, who met me for the first time on the Broom Pool, having learnt from his gillie who I was, asked me to let him see how I used my Grant Vibration rod and the tin of which he had heard and read so much. I protested that I could not think of trying his pool, but all in vain;

I had to fish it or appear most unobliging. I took several long casts without result, and then pulled from off the winch what line was needed to search the river from bank to bank, and, while the line was stretched out to its last coil, I felt it tighten, and struck a fish which, after much manoeuvring, was brought across and safely gaffed. Not many minutes after I felt the slightest touch at the same spot, but with no result. Coil on coil dropped into the tin without my heeding. My eyes were watching for the minnow to see if it had become disfigured by a weed. I saw it coming, and, when it was so close to me that I was in the act of lifting for another cast, something happened that was so startling in its combined effects as to quite unnerve me for an instant and put to ridicule my ready answer to 'How do you manage when a fish comes on while your tin is full of coils?' I killed the fish which had actually splashed me in its rush for the bait; but for an account of what happened during the first few seconds you must ask Mr Pipe, who, being an onlooker, saw most of the fun.

Many who have thought their 'Mallock' or their 'Silex' reel perfection have been converted to the coil. They could cast as far and as accurately as I, though not with so light a lure as mine; but the getting back, with a reel, must cause discomfort which becomes too back-breaking for any one before the day is over on a river like the Lyon. It is a pleasure to stand by a newly-made convert to the tin and show him still further how it is done—there are several helpful wrinkles—and see his pleasure and hear his thanks. Military men are the most apt pupils and show most pleasure, for the head-up attitude that coil-making allows suits the set of their limbs better than the stooping, leaning bend which the winch exacts, and they are also quick to see how much more enticingly they can manipulate the bait with their new-learned method.

A day came when my finger tips wanted breathing on, and, as I met the need, I looked skywards for the cause; to find that the weeping clouds that had come from south-lying Drummond Hill had given place to others that were coming from cold Schiehallion. It grew very nippy, and again I had to throw warm breath on my icy fingers preparatory to another start, only to find the inner circumference of the rod rings filled with ice. My gilllie breathed on each block in turn until his fingers could nip them out; this done, I made another start and got half-way down the pool before the rings needed his breath once more. John did his duty and then looked at me—I did not appear to notice—in a modest way, first at my feet, then upwards, and, when he reached my eye, he smiled and said encouragingly: 'I have known you catch them later, sir, and do you mind when your rings were frozen and a big salmon was on you dipped your rod in the water with the hope of thawing them? You got the fish.' 'So I did, John. Who cares for frost or cold so long as the river runs and the minnow spins?'

Snow on the rocks down to the river's edge and snow between the rocks, hiding the dangers that an unguarded step might make painfully evident, made our movements slow and, at times, undignified owing to the necessity for progression on all fours or by sliding on what Nature intended for sitting on and, maybe, birching. Work is a mild word for walking miles on slippery snow where each three feet forward is lessened by a backward slide.

I was perched on the highest rock in the Elm Tree Pool when a fish rose to the surface of the bubbling rush and showed his length and breadth as he turned to dive with his prize. The frozen line threw off its beads of ice as it raced through the rings in answer to the fish's rush and leap. 'Should we lower the rod top when the salmon is in the air?' is frequently dis-

cussed and answered with a 'yes' or 'no.' Neither answer is correct, for, if you will only notice when next you have a fish on that is going with a rush and rising as he goes, you will instinctively lower your rod top and give him line so that no strain of yours shall help him to a somersault that may bring his shaking head and open mouth towards you, with all the risk of loss such leaps entail. My top was lowered in good time, and, before I could raise it, the fish was fifty yards away and tugging to increase the distance. Round bends that caused the line to pass along jagged edged rocks the fish struggled on down-stream, I quite helpless; for to have kept on a strain would have meant disaster, so, with slackened line, I handed down the rod and then scrambled down myself, wound in the slack, and followed.

John spends the summer months as sailor on a steamer out from Oban and is as agile as a goat. He clambered on in front, bared the stones of snow, and held my forward foot. It was his care that brought me safely to where I could wind until I felt the fish, which struggled little after that. His sailor boots, hidden beneath his trousers, saved my second fish, hooked while on the Little Ladder. This spot is reached by the aid of a short ladder—a fixture—which lands you in a niche in a somewhat perpendicular rock, quite perpendicular from the ledge to the river beneath, from where, if your head is indifferent to its surroundings, you may sometimes cast across a number of fish and now and then have the luck to see one come from the stern of a stone and seize your lure. This was what happened to me when the snow lay deep on the shelving narrow ledge down which, after ascending the ladder, I ought to have found my way to the level of the river about eighty yards down-stream. There was no delay—there often is—on the part of the fish in realising that he was attached to danger. He was off instantly for the 'Long Ladder Pool,' thus

enabling me to give him all I dared, and I dared so much that he was glad to turn as he neared the head of the pool without making an effort to reach the falls. His journey back was a leisurely one, and then he faced the stream again as if waiting to ask, 'Where is my enemy now?' A smart strike set him off up-stream again, as I desired it should, with the result that he tired more quickly than on the former occasion, and was quickly back to the stone from which he had issued at the minnow's invitation. His reluctance to move now made me fear an entanglement, and I gave him a jerk, which moved him again, but to my dismay, it was down-stream that he rattled out the line until I feared he would be over the shallows and amongst the high boulders about 100 yards below.

Now was the time for 'up the ladder and clamber along the narrow ledge and down.' But I had determined not to try that passage while the snow was there, so I called to the sailor to go down, with the hope that I might bring the fish near enough to the side for him to gaff. My position did not permit the rod to aid me in this though the fish was then floating on his side in mid-stream, and I could do nothing but hold on with the line round my hand, hoping that by some means the handy man would reach him. I was hopeful, when I saw John land on a rock well out into the stream, that he would be able to reach it, but he could not. Just then it struggled afresh, and the gillie, thinking the prize would go, stepped off the rock into much above his high boots and gaffed him.

Climatic conditions quickly alter in Glen Lyon, and have much effect upon its visitors. The frost that locks the river to-day and sends them home by its seemingly fixed determination to abide may be gone to-morrow, and the wires will be set to work that bring numbers back to tread the river's banks that once knew but few Spring-comers other than myself. 'Do I like the change?' Yes, and stay the

longer for it. I think it a pleasant break to see the form and hear the voice of a brother sportsman. I dislike an empty house; my own was quickly filled with little strangers—some of them are with me still—who have grown to be my best friends. When the company at the hotel is a pleasant one much is learned, energies are sharpened, and there is more inclination for just one more try before leaving off. The spur of competition had much to do with my success that season, which was beyond all previous records, thirty-four fish, which totalled 620 pounds, in thirty-three days. My knowledge of the river helped me much, and the coiling tin I am sure gave me some advantage.

CHAPTER XVI

FROM EUSTON TO LOCH ALSH—FISHING AT GLENELG—
ON TO GLENSHIEL—A GATHERING OF MERRY
SCOTSMEN.

WHEN two of my sons, Walter and Kirk, invited me to join them in a summer holiday in the Highlands where there might be a hope of fishing, I had to consider that, while I was very familiar with much of Scotland's Winter and Spring fishings, I was not so well up in the knowledge of where to go for sport in summier time beyond the Tweed. But I know something about many fishing places I have never seen. I think I must be a good listener to tales of sport. When any of my fishing friends say, 'Have you ever been to——, Geen?' and I have to answer, 'No,' I do it so inquiringly that I get much information, which I store. In this manner I learned that there are two rivers at Glenelg, in Inverness-shire, having sea-trout and salmon. I remembered, too, accounts of grand takes of pollack there by a friend of mine, who lost five out of the six baits that I gave him in jaws of monsters which he could not hold. So we decided on Glenelg.

Our first lengthy stop after leaving Euston was at Loch Alsh, where the Highland Railway now terminates, just opposite to, and within a mile of, the Isle of Skye. The last portion of our journey, the magic ride from Inverness, toilings up and rushings down, had blown into us sufficient of the vigour of the Highlands to make us, after lunch, anxious to explore our halting-place.

The only fishing proved to be dapping for small pollack with a long bamboo, tight line, and a fairly

large white fly. So we turned inland, and from an eminence enjoyed a sight of the wondrously island-dotted sea, which was soon glorified by a magnificent sunset that dipped each little island in a separate colour and yet compelled the thought of one great mauve expanse to the undetailing eye. Herring boats, all with the same peculiar drooping foremast, were making their tortuous journey to the distant open sea, submitting themselves to Nature's tingeings as they passed each isle until at last they all became black specks and the scene displayed no sign of motion save those of changing hues.

The next day we went on to Glenelg by steamer, a trip all too short and speedy for any but the most impatient. Every few minutes the boat seemed to be making straight for land, only to defeat our guess each time by running into an unseen kyle—a narrow rapid leading to wider waters.

We arrived at Glenelg at noon. The hotel is an excellent stopping-place for tourists and anglers, and we found a very pleasant company there, of whom the greater number were evidently fishermen who, in spite of a long period of drought, wore brave looks that showed they were well accustomed to the freaks of salmon rivers in summer time.

'Far too low for the slightest hope, Geen,' was the greeting of a Spring salmon fisher of my acquaintance.

'Have you tried the pollack?' I inquired of him, and his reply shattered my hopes in that direction completely. 'Yes, several times, and not a pull, and the boatmen say this will be one of the years when none will come.'

I learned that pollack visits were very rare, although the rocky ground seemed an ideal home for them. As yet I have failed to find a fisherman who can explain why these fish are always to be found on some rocky coasts and only now and then on others. From experience I have formed the idea that their chief

necessity, after weedy rocks, is warmth of water, and that when they pay their rare visits to colder seas it is only in pursuit of an equally rare rush of their prey to such localities. To those who ask: 'How is it they are found in abundance in the north-west of Ireland and not in Scotland?' the answer is easy. The proximity of the Gulf Stream is the important factor that makes them haunt the Scilly Islands, the coasts of Cornwall, and the far north-west of Ireland. Pollack of a kind, small and dark, or red (the soldier), may be caught in some numbers in the coldest waters, but it is only in the warmer waters that you may hope for pollack in numbers and of the largest size.

We caught cod at Glenelg whenever I could tear my sons from their fly rods and the small brown trout. They were very eager for a real week's fly-fishing until they learned for themselves that the sight of salmon that will not take until the river rises becomes vexatious to those whose time is limited.

The river gave signs of being an ideal one for summer fly-fishing, given much rain. It contains about six good pools, and above them comes the Gorge through which the river runs sometimes swiftly over shallows, sometimes silently in deeps between high rocky sides, which, in many places, admit of no approach to the water.

Fly-fishing in the Gorge is almost impracticable, but there are places where salmon are caught with the worm when a summer flood is on. What is most needed by those coming here for fishing is good length of holiday and a capacity for patiently putting in time until the heavy rain comes. Then good sport is assured both with sea-trout and salmon, which latter run to a large size, a fifteen-pounder being taken there last summer by Mr Fearon, a regular visitor and a very keen sportsman.

There is a loch, set high between two hills, that has a great repute for sport-giving trout, and for those

who will climb to either of the hill-tops there are pictures of wild moorland scenery that well repay the trouble.

On the Sunday—a non-fishing day—we marched off early up the Glen to see the loch and search for spots that should please the artist's eye. Many sights that we two know-nothings would have wished pictures of were dismissed with a wave of his hand, which seemed to give all too eloquent an expression to the pity he felt for our lack of the artistic gift. After most careful instruction as to the manner of accomplishing the duty, I was allowed to carry the long legs on which the camera stands when in action. This to the uninitiated may appear a very trifling affair, but it is not so when the journeying is up the side of a mountainous hill and the sun is doing its best to cook you.

I always understood that the photographer is a little bit of an autocrat in his dealings with ordinary mortals, but I don't remember ever having so fully realised it before that day. It was : 'Take this and do be careful.' 'Stand there—oh, please, don't shuffle, I said "stand." 'Oh, there's a laugh; did you see his face, Walter, just as I snapped him?'

I declined to go all the way to the top of the high hill to see the lake that is supposed to be full of trout, so I sat me down by the little burn that tumbles with refreshing music from the lake to the river that's in the meadows down below.

Being rested and thirsty I got a drink from the burn by dipping my nose into it. The movements needed to do this brought to view clusters of wild raspberries, and, when I had gathered the best of these, I saw that farther up the little glen, in which the burn had worked its deep cutting, there were more than could be gathered in a day. I tried the nuts, but they were, of course, quite soft; but I found some wortleberries, and laid my handkerchief over them so as to find the spot easily to show them to

the boys, who had often eaten this fruit in Devonshire pies but had never seen it growing.

They were gone for quite two hours, and I had another long rest, mused, and wrote some notes in the little dell that formed my world, where everything seemed perfect and perfectly arranged. The ferns were of every shade, and, up amongst them and above their heads, were the canes with berries of glittering red, looking like gems, dotted so lavishly as if there were, as there is, no limit to Nature's bounty. Above these again the hazel bushes, laden with nuts, hung down in graceful bends that said quite plainly, 'I protect the lesser plants below.' Still higher up were the spreading branches of tall ash-trees, decked out with their lovely fluttering leaves, and appearing much too proud to look down upon what they shaded.

The musing fit has left me, and I am wide awake again and wondering what can keep the boys so long. I know they will return this way, that's a family faith, so what shall I do to give them some surprise beyond the mild one of seeing how 'worts' grow. The burn whispers, 'Tickle a trout and prove that you are as young as flattering friends sometimes vow you are.' 'What fools we old men are!' so said the gay Lord Quex. How easily fooled we are with pretty words from smiling lips; but it is putting their flattery to the severest test when an old man attempts to tickle trout.

Here come the boys, and I'll get the artist (if I can) to take a photo of the spot I have been dreaming in.

Our next stay was to be at Glenshiel, a ten miles' drive, the first three being on a good level road. Then came four miles of climbing, which, for the horses' sake, we walked, followed by a three miles' descent on a sloping road, with such a precipice on the lower side that we chose to walk this portion for our own sake. We were glad that we were walking when at one

place the horses shied alarmingly. The only explanation given to us for this sudden show of spirit was the driver's remark, as he looked at the stone-dotted hill-side: 'I wonder who has been rolling that one down and turning it the wrong side up.'

The road winds first this way and then that, in a zigzag fashion, to graduate the great drop to Loch Duich, which, with its mountainous surroundings, its fir plantations, and white houses dotted here and there on its shores, makes quite an Alpine picture.

The hostess of the Shiel Hotel, a sister of the host of Glenelg, was expecting us, and after kindly welcome hurried us in to dinner.

The company assembled was composed of men much younger than myself, who rose to shift their places to make room for us, while he who occupied the seat of honour, to my great surprise, came towards me and held out his hand with, 'I am glad to meet you, Mr Geen; we would certainly have waited dinner for you had Miss Mackintosh but known the time of your arrival. Now, please, take my seat. I'll tell you why and all about it presently.'

Protestations were of no avail; I was almost pushed into the vacant headship while being assured that several of those sitting round the board would be furthering their studies by doing a little carving. 'They are mickle fit for aught else.' The laughter that followed this showed the speaker to be a privileged person, but roars greeted the retort from somewhere at the table-end, 'It's your way to Harley Street you're carving, doctor, as a mighty *Helminthologist*.'

I found myself presiding over nine young Scotsmen, whose names and occupations I was to gather from their spokesman, who, now seated on my right, told me he was well acquainted with my friend Dr Ferguson, of Richmond, and that possibly I might have heard him speak of a Dr Rorie, of Cardenden.

We were delighted to meet a friend of our doctor while among so many strangers, and, having told him this, I asked who were the owners of the happy faces that surrounded him. They were all Scottish, I found, and were made up of Dr Henderson, in practice at Kirkcaldy, four newly-fledged surgeons—one the great star of promise of his year—a young clergyman, an accountant, and a student of singing. This happy group seemed happiest when the members of it were butting at each other with some laughing reminiscence. I had been so puzzled by the *Helminthologist* joke that curiosity prompted me to ask its meaning. It was the reverend gentleman, the recipient of one of Dr Rorie's digs, that told me in flavoured Scotch the following tale :—

'I must tell you, Mr Chairman, that the doctor is a man of whom we are very proud. We are proud of him from his every side, but particularly so for his wonderful abilities at diagnosis. If he has a failing it is his dislike to long tales of woes; he wants to see the woes and to guess the tales. Now a son of a poor neighbour of ours had the misfortune to trip backwards and sit in a pail of scalding water. When our dear friend, the doctor, was fetched he gave the mother no chance of telling him anything of the pail of scalding water but said at once, "Now, my lad, show me what's troubling you," and, when he got a view, pronounced it the biggest ringworm he had ever seen.'

This made it the doctor's turn. 'That tale will soon be needing patches; but you told it well, Douglas, and it will be only fair to let the company hear of one of your recent triumphs.'

The Rev. Mr Baird,' he said, 'went to offer consolation to a dying man, and, as he was especially obdurate, the clergyman tried to harrow his feelings with a threat of the King of Terrors, but was soon discouraged by, "Hoots, toots, mon, I'm no scairt at the King of Terrors; I've been leeven with the Queen of them these

sax-and-thirty years, and the King, I'm thinking, can be no muckle waur.”

General laughter greeted this; I suppose the tale was new to them. It was the clergyman himself who laughed the loudest, so perhaps it was new to him, but new or not, just as the laughter began to subside, he started us all off afresh with his ‘Ach! it’s a puir chance the clergy have when Dr Rorie has done his best.’

The meal and the evening passed with many another tale, and a song or two from Marcus Thomson, the London trained singer, who, with his splendidly rich baritone voice, gave us, among others, ‘The Sands o’ Dee.’

CHAPTER XVII

THE BRIDGE POOL AT NIGHT—OUR HAYDEN COFFIN—
A MUCH-PRAISED LOCH

AFTER next morning's breakfast four of our company left us. They were on the tramp, a walking holiday, while their friends were staying for the fishing.

We tried sea-fishing first, but a morning at it convinced us that Loch Duich's waters, although salt, are too far from the open sea to afford much sport. We got a few little cod and a very nice string of flounders. In the afternoon we walked by the river, but found the water too low to give hope of success; still the sight of sea-trout in several pools, and a salmon here and there, caused Walter and Kirk to regret that they had not brought their rods and to make plans for a good try after tea.

As we were leaving the hotel in the evening my attention was called to an extraordinary alteration in the outlook, due to changes in the atmosphere. The great, bare, brown hills in front—the Five Sisters of Kintail—had apparently advanced so much nearer as to appear quite close, and their details, which eye could not reach before, were now clearly outlined—a sure sign of rain. How unreal they looked against the blue sky, which, with light clouds here and there, appeared to press them in, may be gathered from my matter-of-fact son who obtrusively remarked, 'Why, it's just the cardboard effects of Earl's Court.'

While we looked and talked a shower came which brought a rainbow, and the form it came in, an almost completed ring, added further unreality to the scene.

Six brace of sea-trout was our evening's catch,

and Walter and Kirk were delighted with their introduction to this sporting fish. They had worked their way up as far as the little loch called Loch Shiel, and had seen a salmon leap in it, and were anxious to have a try for this on the morrow if they could have the use of a boat they had also seen. When they found that this was possible, they indulged their most hopeful speculations as to chances of big fish, overhauled my fly-books, and then passed them on to me to rearrange.

Another merry dinner-time came and another course of good-humoured argument and pleasant banter. Then, I know not how, the conversation took a serious turn, and the subject of discussion was the Scottish Church and the dissension between the Wee Frees and the Uniteds. I was soon out of my depth as I listened to the making of points which needed great store of learning in Theological History. The two brothers, the accountant and the singer, had, after a while, the field to themselves, and dug deeper and deeper into distant epochs with many a 'No, sir,' and 'Yes, sir,' from each to the other. The singer, with a love for fishing that dominated even his love for a discussion, was the first to give a qualified surrender, expressing himself as anxious to try what the Bridge Pool would be like at night. He had never, he said, caught a fish heavier than a half-pounder, and here there were salmon all waiting. 'And, ye ken, Rowan, it's fush I came for and nae for the putting of ye richt where yer doctrine is at fault. Come ye oot and bring the net wi' ye, and maybe the gaff, and I'll listen to yer clavers at the river's side.'

This caused a general movement towards the nearest pools, where we found the sea-trout were rising briskly, and, by the time dark night had fallen, we had captured upwards of two dozen, which made a pretty show when set upon two dishes with a lamp shining upon them.

Marcus—our Hayden Coffin—was the most successful. He had been fishing with a Silver Doctor,

which not only beguiled the largest of the trout, but also induced one of the many salmon in the Bridge Pool to take it. A little crowd of us, with gaff and nets, answered his cry for help, but alas ! they were not needed; the line fouled a bush and the fish broke away.

That night it rained, rained perseveringly; and our breakfast-table was enlivened by the sound of the still enduring storm. Anxiously we all visited the river. It was not yet affected. All then scattered to enjoy whatever hope there was of success.

My sons and I visited the much-praised loch. I rowed the boat while they fished, but though we saw some big fish move they came not to the rods. My companions, however, were highly pleased with the basket of trout they captured and with the improvement which they had made in casting.

While rowing, I had noticed the increase in the volume of the burns, and, as we neared the inn, I heard the roar of water from the chief of the streams which joins the Shiel about 200 yards from home. The river was rising; it rose while we watched, and sent us hurrying to our fly books, to prepare for afternoon.

The catches that day when put together made an imposing show. There were seventy sea-trout and a salmon of eleven pounds. Marcus became keener than ever while viewing the salmon as it hung on a garden-seat between the splendid take of trout ready for the photographer, and talked of not going to bed for fear of a repetition of his dream of catching fish, which had kept him sleeping far too late that morning.

In the evening the rain came down in torrents, and, after a lengthy wait, it was decided there should be no fishing, so we had more songs until bedtime came.

Early-risers found the river looking even more fit than on the previous day; and there was much evidence of impatience while waiting for breakfast and at the meal itself. Some old stagers have learned so to control their feelings that you can see no differ-

ence in them when a full river comes after weeks of waiting. There were no masks upon these youngsters' faces. Their chance had come; they knew it; and they gave no thought to dissimulation. Eating became little but a mere stoking. The sound of voices calling with a quip to the servers of the varied dishes drove ultra-refinement to the winds, and we were just a tableful of noisy scramblers.

Sport all round was capital that day. The sea-trout in their feeding were as indiscriminate and hasty as their captors had so lately been, and were ready to take any fly, in any place, however thrown. It was such a day as sends a novice home with pride that he has so nearly learned an art which his elders are said not to have mastered yet. There were fine brown trout, too, among the captures; but Marcus had the prizes, two splendid salmon, one of which weighed fifteen pounds, the other nine.

'Quickly come and quickly go' is the case with spates in Highland streams, and by next noon the river had returned to normal level, to new sobriety and gentie ripplings among the boulders. But, before it reached no-fishing limit, it gave to us more of its game sea-trout and one more salmon.

The Shiel has this advantage over many mountain streams, that in its loch, within a half-mile of the hotel door, there is always a hope of fish, so that fishers need not rust while waiting for the river's rising.

We spent a day, a delightful day, in exploring the chief burn spoken of above. 'Burn' is but a tiny name for such a stream up which, at times, good sea-trout make adventurous way to pools of the quaintest shape. Some are broad and shallow, where a shoal of fish may be seen hiding beneath the eddying foam; while others are deep, long, and narrow, not three feet wide, where a fish when hooked is almost sure to leap from the narrow trough to the bare rocks, there sometimes to free himself and then flop back to the trough again.

The hotel fishing includes five good pools in the main stream, beginning with the one beneath the bridge that always holds fish to stay the idler's footsteps while he rests, with his arms upon the wall, and peeps down to watch their doings. It's seldom a village bridge that spans a river remains unoccupied for long, and it was so with this one. No matter what the weather was, its coping stones were being polished at all hours of the day by a row, sometimes long and at others short, of sleeves, given weight to by chins that seemed to rest on them heavily while the owners solved problems. Sea-trout were numerous here, but very shy until the day was almost gone, and then they fell ready victims to quite large flies.

Above this is a pool called 'The Half-Pool,' just below the junction of the Shiel and the 'Big Burn.' This can be fished from either side, and holds a rushing deep, a holding run, and an eddying shallow.

Opposite the schoolhouse is the long 'Captain's Pool,' a good length of capable-looking water, easily fishable over the low-boughed alders or from the schoolhouse side.

Then comes the narrow 'Inkpot Pool,' hemmed in by dangerous weeds, from which I was told salmon were often taken, but I got none.

Loch Shiel comes next, about which I have already written. The reeds are thickly growing round it, and you will need the boat. Above this is the last of the fishing, a good, deep, slowly-running length of water, in which were a large number of sea-trout, and where only a breeze was needed to keep us busy. At times the surface of the water in this pool was as a sheet of glass, beneath which shoals of sea-trout passed close to me, as I stood, hidden by a bush, ready to drop my fly, and by this dibbling method I got several, but it was when the shades of night came that we had most success, and even after it was so dark that we could only guess where our fly had fallen we got them with a Silver Doctor.

In the visitors' book you may see the names of many clever fishers, and amongst them that of Mr Cholmondeley Pennell, who, perhaps, has been more successful on the Shiel than any other man. His captures, and those of others, as recorded in that book, make hopeful reading for the new-comer, as, given a full river, there is no need, nor time, to sigh at their successes; he may hope to beat all records.

The hotel has amongst its men-servants one whose duty it is to get fish for the table when the anglers fail, and for this purpose he may use a net at the river's mouth or a rod upon the river. His rod is old, battered, broken, spliced, and bound with rough cord in sundry weak places; but, nevertheless, seek out the owner of it, and get from him information where to go and what fly to use.

Glenshiel is hard, both for the mind and body, to get away from. Ask your kindly landlady about the drive back to Glenelg and the day the Mallaig boat leaves there. We had our day fixed for returning, and started asking questions over-late, so that our getting back was roundabout. But we managed it by driving to Strome Ferry to catch the eleven twenty-five. The distance by the road is somewhere near to twenty miles, and to accomplish it the mail allows four hours. We rose very early, and did the task comfortably, although we had so many hills to climb. At a ferry there was to cross we were delayed while men were summoned, the boat brought over, and horses, cart, and luggage packed in it. But we were still ahead of the mail, which every day does this long journey, and, as we mounted the hills on the other side, we saw it reach the ferry-stage. There was time at Strome Ferry for a real breakfast, and time to prepare ourselves for a renewal of the treat of a run over the Highland Railway to Perth, and then, by the L. and N. Western, to 'that dear old hut, our home.'

CHAPTER XVIII

A GRAND TIME IN CONNEMARA—BONIFACE AND HIS
GUESTS—PAT AND KITTY—BRIAN O'MALLEY

IRELAND stands foremost, next after my native Devon, to inspire thoughts of happy days among fun-loving folk with roguish faces and twinkling eyes. It may be that my upbringing under the close influence of a man who was always boyish, as the Irish are, and very Irish in wit and manner, may be held accountable for this, or he may have had Irish blood within his veins, some of which he gave to me.

A profound remark from a child's tongue caused an astonished father to observe that his prodigy must have had some prior existence. Now if this be possible, within the realms of Nature's ordering, there comes in the chance that I have been an Irishman, or shall be if the whirligig goes on. Who can be more pleased to tread Irish soil, who happier on an Irish car, who loves the blarney more, or goes oftener to fish Irish streams than I?

My boys need a breath or two of the Old Country's air occasionally, almost as much as I do, and it's the one we call Harry that is drooping for it now; so we are off, and it's a fine time we intend having in Connemara.

Mid-September is a little late for a start on a somewhat lengthened tour during which, if Fortune favours us with weather fitting, we are going to test the charts that tell the depths where pollack should be found round many an island 'twixt Achill and Arranmore.

Eight days of wind and rain, wind that meant



storms at sea, preceded the one appointed for our start, and, although we are good sailors, we were glad to find Euston full of sunshine that gave some promise that the gales had passed. September sunshine is made glorious by its promise of a second summer, during which the lassitude engendered by

the first may pass away and fit us for vigorous enjoyment. It's then that we can bring something to the feast that makes a day of sport worth a week on crowded sands in August.

Euston, a waving flag and a loud-resounding whistle, and we are off to Ireland where I and mine are sure to be at home. I shall jump the journey, merely mentioning that the sea was lively, and that there were those on board who would have liked to jump it too.

No sooner were we on Irish soil than I heard my name. I like to ensure my bed, as more than once I have had to do without one in that same country, but it remains a mystery to me how the hotel porter picked me out from a throng of people who must have looked more in need of bed than I did. We were just in time for dinner, for which the sea had made us eager; and after that there was an evening to do with as we chose.

For many years I have had no need to guide my sons to places of amusement, as my knowledge of where best to go is of the scantiest compared with the experiences of even the youngest of them. I mention this because it was in consequence of a whisper that Harry gave the driver of a car that we were quickly over a mile of Dublin cobbles and in the midst of a crowd that carried us into a very noisy entertainment. Of course I protested, but there I was, to be a witness, however much I might be pained, of the fare provided. I was pained quite early, and had to hold my sides until Harry came to my relief with 'Steady, dad, steady.' I never tried harder in all my life to follow good advice, but occasionally I had to hold my sides; they ached so. To make matters worse, the turns that pained me most were boisterously encored, and so great was the contagion of clapping hands, that I caught myself in the very act of clapping mine.

In spite of such woeful dissipation we were at Broadstone Station next morning in time for the seven a.m. Midland Great Western Limited Mail for Achill, whence we were to take a car for Dugort for a stay of two days, and then start on our tour of the coast and islands of Connemara.

It was a prefect Autumn morning when we settled ourselves in corner seats of a comfortable carriage for a look just once again at the many places we should pass where I had fished or shot. The train was in the best of humours and, Irish-like, desired to show that it had capacities of a high order; when it slowed it seemed to say, 'Now look at this and look at that; have you seen their like in all your travels?' At Mullingar it made a stay which gave me time to tell my companion that the rivers and lakes near would need a month to test, and of a splendid time of great success that I once spent there. As the train was starting, an aged man offered me a bunch of withered yellow grapes: 'Sixpence, yer honour, and it's everybody that's calling for thim, and the train in a divil of a hurry.'

Our next stop was at Athlone. Need I say more than that it is on the Shannon? Is there any other name that conjures up such varied possibilities? I think not, unless it be the sea.

Castlerea, Claremorris, and Castlebar are worth a stay, and so is Westport, but I must hurry on to Achill, and from there to our journey's end, that I may have space to tell you of recent doings with rod and line.

Dugort was reached just before the dinner-hour, and gathered in the lobby, waiting the call, was quite a little crowd. Conspicuous among the number was Boniface himself, who welcomed us, and then gave instructions as to the disposal of our baggage, including our rod box, which, when laid beside the others, seemed to gain in size, and attracted much attention.

There was a moment's wait for an upstairs guide, during which a youngish man approached my son, and voiced the question which several would no doubt have asked, 'Have either of you fished here before?' and when he got the answer 'No,' he said, 'You have brought some rods, I see, and long ones, too, judging by your box.' 'It certainly does seem huge beside the others,' said Harry, 'but in it are some little rods to which I pin much faith.' To this came, 'Well! I wish you better luck than mine. I have little rods, but, as yet, I have pinned nothing to them.'

When in our room Harry was of opinion that the troutng prospects were none too bright, and in this he was confirmed by a further conversation during dinner with the angler who had addressed him in the lobby, who informed him, 'This is a jolly place, but the lake on which reliance for sport is placed had rendered up most of its white trout before I came, and the few remaining ones seem proof against all lures, though I have tried them at break of dawn and at dusky eve. But the landlord, you know, is such a jolly, hopeful fellow, and he says that we only want rain and the lake will be full of them again. It is not quite right to discourage you, perhaps, but you were sure to find it out.'

'Thank you very much,' said Harry, 'you have saved us time.'

There can be but few who have pitied those fly-fishers who deem all other sports inferior and unworthy of their notice more than I have done. I would sooner hunt rats than kick my heels waiting and waiting for what does not come until my chance has flown. I suppose they think that the superiority, the delicacy, and, to put it in a word, the Art of fly-fishing makes it sacrilege for its votaries to worship at any other shrine. Let them try spinning a lure in rapid rivers, combing rocks from behind which a salmon will not move and could not take your bait

were he so inclined unless offered to him as no mere tyro can. That fish will not take a fly for weeks to come, so, just for once, Mr Fly-fisher, take my rod and cast my bait, and you will find that spinning needs much learning, for, without it, you will lose many a bait and catch no fish. I love my fly-rod, and I have taught each of my sons to walk your path with some skill, and they know that therein lies the poetry of angling; but we have some love for its prose, and in that box of rods beside fly-rods of all lengths there are rods for pike, and, somewhere, two short and stubborn ones for sea-fishing. We have come for sport, and are prepared to get it from the sea should rivers fail. Please, fly-fishers, bear with me when pollack fishing comes into my writings. It may be as painful to you as the bull-pup hanging to his nose was to the boy; even he had some satisfaction in being told that it would be the making of the pup. So cheer up, all of us.

Be where you may, next morning comes, and, with it, thanks to sleep, unclouded brains and vigour. We were as fresh as daisies when I asked the maid if Mr Sheridan, the landlord, was yet visible, and as the reply told us that he was probably still in bed we walked down to the sea, there to find huge Atlantic waves tumbling in that would prevent the launching of a boat. We sat and threw pebbles to while away the time till breakfast, or until the host should appear, and we could arrange with him how best to use our day, or what of it was left when he should please to wake.

‘You seem to me, dad,’ said Harry, ‘to manage your sleep well; you drop off at will and wake to order like a kiddie. Perhaps the landlord is not so gifted, and while you could soon teach him to wake at the proper time, there is a probability that he would prefer to learn how to fall asleep as you do, and, indeed, so should I.’

'That, my boy, is due to a sweet memory of a sweet voice—only one other like it—and it used to say, "Phillie, dear, do'ee sleep," and I would say, to please her, "I'se s'leeping, mother," and the eyelids that closed to cheat often lost power to open. You have heard a voice as sweet as my mother's was. It's sweet memories that lull us to content and sleep.'

I heard the echo of a voice in the waves that lovely Autumn morning, and could plainly see the face and form of the little maid I married, and, quite forgetting that a son of hers sat near, I whispered :—

'And I as rich in having such a jewel
As twenty seas, if all their sand were pearl,
The water nectar, and the rocks pure gold.'

Then my boy's strong arms came under mine to lift me up and march me off.

The bustle of an Irishman who has overslept himself is out of all proportion to its effect, excepting only the soothing influence it has on himself. He is inclined to think the first half of a day well spent when he has thus asserted his manhood, and is quite prepared thereafter to stretch himself or sit upon a fence. Where's the need for hurry? The waves still roll and the fly-fisher waits for rain; he knows this, and perhaps handsome, happy Boniface is right in saying by his actions, 'Take it easy, boys; sun yourselves; to-morrow's near; leave all till then.' A sixty-miles-per-hour man who thinks himself the only person who has a right to be upon the road is a lively creature that is only a temporary bore, but the late-rising, lazy man is so much with you in the briefest time that you have fears he is to be with you for evermore. He worries me quickly, and I hunger to kick him when he stretches, and thirst to put a thorn betwixt his sitting and the fence.

It was ten a.m. when I caught sight of our host. He was on the other side of the road resting his back

against the iron rails that rose from out a low wall, which allowed him only a portion of a seat, on which he perched as much of himself as the narrow ledge permitted. I crossed to him.

'Good-morning, Mr Sheridan.'

'Good-morning, sir.'

'I am here with my son with the hope of doing a little fishing; can you suggest where we are most likely to get it?'

I admit that this question could not assist him to assist us, so I deserved what I got, which was: 'I was thinking, perhaps, you would like some fishing when I saw you had brought your rods, and I said to myself we shall be having rain soon, I hope.'

My next question should have been my first: 'Is there anywhere round this island a sheltered spot where a boat could be had to take us sea-fishing?'

'Bedad and there's that anyway, sir,' and with that he fairly jumped from his seat and called loudly for 'Pat,' which quickly brought a young, energetic-looking man from the stable-yard, who was told to bring a car to take two gentlemen fishing, and, as he turned to obey this order, there was added, 'Now quick, Pat, these gentlemen would be there long ago.'

Irish readiness to help some one else to do the thing that other has in mind was to the fore, and we found the car waiting us when we appeared with our lunch, rods, and tackle, and, as the little six feet six inch rods were at their length, there was some surprise on the faces of the knot of fishers who had been told by Pat we were after trout.

The steep ascent of half a mile to the cross roads made conversation easy, so when Pat told us that he feared the lough was low and bright, I explained to him that we wanted a boat to take us sea-fishing.

'Is that so, yer honours? Thin it's meself that will soon have ye on the say, and it's a big boat ye'll

need to hould them, and it's a sight we'll show the throuters this same noight.'

Then he relieved himself of some of his energy by whipping up his mare and saying, 'It's Brian O'Malley I'll be wanting if ye'll stir yer bones that ate more corn for yer paces than ye desarve. Ye'll be knowing who's driving if I live to the cross roads. Is it meself then that's wid ye or no?'

To divert Pat's thoughts from the mare and whip, I asked him if he knew what pollack were.

'Is it the fish yer honour manes?' said he, and, on learning that it was, he told us with quite a solemn face: 'It's the say that's full av them, and it's Brian O'Malley that will tell you that same for thruth. Now then be off wid ye' and a jerk of the reins as we turned the corner at the hill-top started the mare into a leg stretching trot that moved the car in such handsome fashion as satisfied the driver, who, pleased, stroked his mare quite kindly with the whip while saying, 'Now, Kitty, ye'll be showing the gentlemen that it's meself that's dhriving ye, and begorra it's a load of fish ye'll be bringing when yer head is turned for home this same noight if we get Brian O'Malley in the boat; but where will I be finding the bhoy? The divil take him if he's away for turf.'

Evidently O'Malley was all important, and we entered into Pat's anxiety as to the possibilities of his being away. Harry gave expression to this anxiety by asking, 'How many miles have we to drive before we come to O'Malley's place?'

'It's foive of them, yer honour, and if they weren't so long there would be more av them, I'm thinking; but it's meself and Kitty'll make them divilish short. It's in his pratie plot we'll have to find the rogue.'

Down rough roads, along level ones with ruts, round corners, the mare spun the wheels as if she too would be glad to see O'Malley, and, when the village in which he lived was sighted, she seemed to quicken

her pace, for the car swayed more than ever, and fairly jumped when a wheel took a larger stone than usual. On our right as we neared the group of dwellings, men and women were at work on patches of a much-divided field, and to get a view of them Pat stood up, and there he saw O'Malley, no room for doubt, for he twirled his whip round his head in the wildest fashion while he shouted, 'The bhoy is digging praties. It's meself that sees him.' In his excitement he did not notice that he was nearing a shallow ditch until the heavy drop of the wheel on my side banged him down heavily upon his seat.

'Whist, ye careless brute. Couldn't ye see I was shpaking to O'Malley? Come out av it.'

The energy of our driver continued unabated until we were in the boat, which was in a much briefer space of time than I expected, considering she lay 100 yards or more from where she could be launched and the bhoy O'Malley was far older than myself. He and his fishing mate, with our driver's help, got the boat upon their heads, and walked with it as if it were a shell, and indeed it proved to be a flimsy shell of thin deal boards covered with canvas fortified by tar. I thought her none too safe for four to go in, but, after we had crossed the bar that caused her to bump her tail in such a fashion as jerked our heads at their full weight upon our shoulders, she glided like a duck over the big oily waves of the open sea. Our driver had pushed us off, and then spread out his arms as if to bless us, unmindful of a wave that came to wet him to the knees.

Brian O'Malley, the head boatman, whom Pat so lovingly called a bhoy, was the most ancient mariner I had ever shipped with, and much exceeded, in appearance, the seventy-three years he later on confessed to; yet there was a grimness in his work and ordering of the course which soon inspired a confidence that he still possessed more go than many

a younger man. Pat Lavelle, the second boatman, a sturdy, dark-skinned, black-haired man, showed a deference to his comrade which matched well our driver's faith that Brian O'Malley would meet our needs.

The fisherman had lines for all sorts of fishing, so we felt sure of fun of some kind, but it was none the less a question of importance that Harry asked,—

'Are there any pollack to be caught, Mr O'Malley?'

'I can take ye where they are,' was his reply, so we put our tackle together, and were ready when we were told that we might put our lines out.

'There'll be foive fathoms here, yer honours,' said O'Malley.

Had he said, as our driver did, 'The say is full av thim,' I should have thought but little of it, compared with his definite information as to the depth and his waiting to see what use we made of it.'

CHAPTER XIX

ACHILL POLLACK—A COLLISION—IRISH COMPLIMENTS— A HOPELESS TUSSLE

THE midday sun came down from an unclouded sky, and there would be little chance of sport unless we sunk our lures to somewhere near the fish; our guide, knowing this, had wished to test our knowledge. The boldest biter and the toughest fighter for his weight, as I claim the pollack to be, is very shy when the sun is bright, so, if you would catch him then, you must sink your bait to within a foot cf where he hides beneath the waving weeds of sunken rocks.

Five fathoms is a depth that needs a heavy lead, even with the finest line, when the boat is rowed at

the needed pace to spin a rubber worm or any other lure, so we changed our leads for the heaviest we use—viz., six ounces. Brian seemed pleased at this, but a cloud came over his much-wrinkled face as he stretched out his hand to take one of the thin blue lines we had attached them to, and the shake he gave his head betrayed a lack of confidence, as also did his question, 'What size fish will this be houlding?' Brian's ancient face, handsome yet in spite of furrows, and its sorry-to-doubt expression, made me say,—

'We will be very careful should we have the luck to hook a big one.'

Apparently pleased with this reply, he answered, 'Then it's meself and Pat that will take you where the big ones are, and should it happen they're shlapping we'll wake them for ye when the toide is turning.'

To start at twelve and then to be told that the quarry may be asleep would make most of us anxious to know the time when the awakening might be expected, but I did not ask as a violent tug came which caught the angler napping, and Harry almost lost his rod. That it was a heavy fish was soon apparent, so, to avoid the chance of its getting round my line, I commenced to wind in, but before I had turned the handle twice, I had to loosen my hold of it and give way to a rush that spun it out again in such merry fashion that the fish was a long way back and down before I could stay its progress, and I was quite relieved, when I was able to wind on him, to find that as yet he had not got amongst the weeds. Harry by this time had his fish well in hand, and the rushes it made were growing shorter, but that he was mastering a heavier one than mine I had no doubt, so I told him to give me the chance of bringing mine to Brian's gaff to clear the road of danger before he attempted his. Both fish fought bravely for a lengthened time, possibly somewhat prolonged by our anxiety to show the dcbuting Brian that our lines could hold them

when a rod is used that will give and take, and is used with care. It might be also that our wish to show some fish at the hotel on our return eased our hands a bit.

My fish was not of such a size as to make a fuss about—nine pounds, we guessed; but after it was gaffed Harry's flopped upon the surface and showed itself to be of quite another year and probably twice the weight of mine. Freed from effort, when mine was in, I could watch the changes on the boatmen's faces as their hopes and fears rose and fell with the progress of the battle, and when the prize was safely aboard it was pleasing to see their contented looks. Had you seen these two fish when first laid in the boat, I think you would have agreed with me that pollack were planned by Nature for strength and speed to have pleasure in the most rapid currents, and that they look capable of giving glorious trouble to an angler.

It was changed men that started now to search again for fish; they wore a smile, talked, and filled the boat with joyous expectation. O'Malley confided to us the number of his years, most of which time he claimed to have spent in catching fish, and while doing this he had become familiar with each and every rock where pollack hide to rush on passing prey.

'If yer honours will look a bit forward,' he said, 'ye will see a smooth place on the water; well near it there's a rock that shows its head at low ebb when the Spring toides are here, and it's Pat and meself will row you round it if it plaise you to put the light sinkers on yer lines.'

Twice we made a circle round the place without a nibble, and, as the fishermen seemed surprised, we wound in our lines—first one and then the other, that we might not be without a chance of fish—to see if they were clear and the baits spinning as they

should. Finding this was so, I had little hope remaining for that particular spot, but I did not say so. If at my age I do not know that men will help you most when trusted it is time I did, for when only in my teens I heard my father say to a man of his who had just retired to bed and looked out from an upper window to see who knocked, 'Skinner, I want you to drive to Lynton. It's most important, and I don't know whom to trust but you.' 'All right, maister, I be coming.' My dad's faith in men not only got them out of bed, but caused them sometimes to surprise themselves by the work they did. We trusted O'Malley and his mate, and were justified by the result. Their desire to get fish was unmistakable, and they showed they were resourceful, as at their next attempt they rowed round the other way, so that where the boat had passed with the tide before it had now to be rowed against. It was just where the rowing needed most exertion that a heavy fish came on which, aided by the tide, needed much straining of the rod and line to thwart his efforts to reach again his weedy haunt, and which, when beaten at this trick, struggled near the surface in plucky fashion until gaffed.

It was much past lunch-time when we had finished here, so we went on shore to refresh and stretch ourselves. Hoping that we should get men to take us out, we had brought food and drink for four. This finished, there passed a whispered word or two between the men, and then Brian said: 'If it'll plaise yer honours ye'll be thryng yer luck again. Ye must take some fish wid ye back to Mr Sheridan.'

Brian had the seat next to me, so it happened that we often caught each other's eye. Unlike the generality of his countrymen he seldom spoke, but his smile and the contraction of a shoulder that bent his head a little to one side told me much. It was with a smile—a half-closed eye, and a nod in the direction of the spot whence the fish had come, that he told us there were

plenty left, but we were not going to let the rogues know we were after them.

We got a fish, and sometimes two, each time we passed what appeared to me to be a shoulder of the hidden rock, as there the water shot out from its course, leaving in its place foaming eddies, underneath which no doubt little fish came for shelter, and, while hunting these, the pollack saw our lures.

We got our next success, five good fish, at a rocky promontory where the water kissed the point with a soft lapping sound and then hurried off, carrying with it other water that eddied out to meet it. When round this point our course was held towards a rock whose head was black with, to many, Nature's most repulsive handiwork, ghoul-like cormorants. Some stood with legs apart and wings outspread to catch the breeze, while others monotonously moved their heads from side to side, thus causing their weird green eyes to glitter in the sun. It must be supposed that these creatures serve some good purpose, but I could wish the gluttons might be banished until that purpose is discovered. They allowed us to come quite close before they tumbled off, leaving the rock none the prettier for their visits. I little thought we were to have a turn round this, but so it happened, and we got three fish; so pollack, of the size we caught, do not mind this Satanic-looking bird.

As we made for the next ground we heard the puffings, and saw the passing, of a hastening school of porpoise, whose speed and gambols conveyed the notion that they were hurrying off to some merry-making. There was plenty to make us feel the wildness of the place, for, added to the other sights, there came to view, just as we received the order to let out again, in the depths that run close to the rocky sides of the bay, a monstrous, gray-headed seal. Its rising was commented on by our second boatman, who seemed to give the creature a name of recognition

and to speak of it in conjunction with salmon nets, but, to interrupt inquiries, we received indications that we were amongst pollack again. It was along this fruitful stretch that we finished our all too short day, and, when the reckoning came, we found we had quite a grand take of fish, over 200 pounds in weight and thirty-one in number.

Where our driver had been meanwhile, or how employed, I did not ask, but we found him just where we had left him, waiting to help drag in the boat, and, as soon as he caught a sight of the fish, he exclaimed, 'Shure and didn't I tell yer honours we should get the fish? And it's ivery one av them we'll be taking back for ividence against the same spalpeens that doubted me.' He looked at us eager for assent. I had some compunction about taking all the fish, but got over it by promising the men that all we might catch on the morrow should be left with them.

Pat's tongue on the homeward journey was given nearly equally to all three of us, my son, myself, and Kitty. If there was any difference the greatest portion was given to the mare which probably understood it best. He seemed quite anxious that Kitty should acknowledge that with her, too, he had kept his promise.

The dinner-bell had rung when we arrived, and we were able to slip upstairs without waste of time to square ourselves. Short as was the interval of our absence, we found on descending that the fish had all been laid in line on the lobby floor, and there stood the landlord seeing that each of them received a touch of a wet cloth that they might look their best.

We were the last to go in to dinner and the last to come out, and, on coming to the lobby, found the company gathered round our host, who, while pointing to the most notable of the fish, was telling them, 'There is no place in Ireland like Keem Bay and Moyteoge Head for pollack, unless it is our bay here.'

In the drawing-room, or, perhaps, I should rather say, the assembling-room, our host was at his best, and if the days had been all evenings, he would have had no trouble in entertaining guests. There appeared to be no subject on which he could not have talked the longest sitting through, and his tales of dare-devil nights in caves with seals were most thrilling, especially to the ladies. Given rain each day or night, Mr Sheridan would prove an ideal host to fly-fishers, but when nights and days have followed each other for a lengthened period without a drop of it, even nights with seals tail off a bit. So I think our host was glad of a cue, and that evening the subject was changed first to pollack and then to a monster conger which so filled a boat that the fisherman preferred to swim and push the boat to shore; of skate whose size and weight needed many men to move them; of ling and cod hauled in on lines with 100 hooks, a prize on each; and of such other wondrous doings that I could but think, as the ladies did, very much of Mr Sheridan.

September mornings have a freshness all their own, and as they come just when man most needs them, they are often welcomed by deep-drawn breaths that give back thankful sighs.

The next day commenced with a glorious morning. There was a thin curtain of the night's mist still remaining when I stepped into the road to read the promises for the day, but it was already coloured by the rising sun. There was a breeze that made waves on the shore below and brought with it a salty flavour, and I was busy breathing like a grampus when a hand came upon my shoulder and a face peered round to mine to see what ailed me.

Harry has unbounded faith in my knowledge of matters piscatorial, and had felt no fear for his line when playing his seventeen-pounder on the previous day; but I had had some misgivings, for I had used

it through the previous season, so, after our morning's greeting, I said, 'I think we had better put new lines on; you'll find some in the basket.' So new lengths were joined to the old ones and wound upon our winches, in compliment to Achill pollack.

We had made every preparation for starting immediately after breakfast, so no sooner was the meal over than we mounted the car, which, although horsed by a different animal, was driven by Pat, who welcomed us with a hearty 'Good-morning to yer honours and good luck to the day.'

While mounting the hill he displayed much spirit in his talk, and some of his tales were worthy of his master. Unwisely, I told him of the Irish driver who when he pulled up his four outside a hotel had one of them drop dead, and how, when the ostler spoke of the luck of its happening there, he said, 'Luck, be jabers! Why the animal was dead on the hill; it's me driving that brought it here to drop.' This was new to Pat, and, I fear, acted as a spur to one whose chief need was a drag, and contributed somewhat to the accident that befell us.

The pace we travelled at seemed to be ever on the increase, and the whip to be making increasing flourishes, when on turning a high-hedged corner we were startled to see a cart within a few yards of us on the same track. The horses were pulled back upon their haunches, and the inevitable collision was thereby modified to a bump of wheels. The men failed to settle who was more to blame, though each spoke as if perfectly sure upon the point. Pat's grievance was thrown into,—

'Devil take ye. Couldn't ye see the pace I was coming at? Isn't the side of the road good enough for the bag av bones ye sit behind?'

The man thus addressed made reply,—

'Bag av bones, is it, begorra, and yerself not fit to bray in the same field with it. But it's meself

that wouldn't keep gentlemen waiting; good luck to yer honours, and may the devil take the driver that should be minding pigs.'

With this he pulled his horse to the side and gave us room to pass. Pat took advantage of this without response, and, though he had a few remarks for us, he gave most attention to his horse, which needed more of it than Kitty had done.

We found the boatmen busy covering with coarse sacking those portions of their boat which had, on the previous day, been so generous to our hands and clothes with that black, sticky stuff which some time during a hot day is nearly sure to make good its effort to produce a smudge upon the face, more probably near the eye or on the nose. I rather like the smell of tar, and am fortunate in that, as I want to make the Norfolk suit I am wearing last the trip; and at present it smells very strong.

The air on the beach was not inviting, but, when out beyond the sand-bar and we were lifted high on the smooth rolling waves to glide down to troughs that filled at our coming and raised us again, we got whiffs of pure salty breezes. The waves sped us on our way, and soon we were paying out our lines some two miles up the rocky coast. I noticed that our boatmen had left their fishing gear at home, and, judging by the difference in their manner, while yesterday they had wished to be benevolently neutral until such time as their lines were needed, to-day they pinned their faith to ours. Waiting silence was changed to talk of rocky homes in useful depths that excited hopes of fish, and yet seemed free from the Irish readiness to favour your fondest wishes.

The waves broke upon the cliffs with a pleasant clash and then fell back seething with the impact, giving a varied movement to the lures we were trundling through the sparkling water. What fish could sleep while Nature moved the sea with soft south

winds, that brought clouds which cast sweeping shadows across the sea, breathed upon the cliffs, and then rose hastily to make room for others that followed in their wake? It was where the blue sky lowered to meet the deeper blue and where white clouds rose to make the most of both that my eyes would go to see whence the shadows came, and then follow them until they disappeared and my thoughts went with them. 'Dad, I think you had a nibble' was what brought them back. 'I did not feel it' was all I could rouse myself to say, but a more complete awakening came when the lad's winch noisily proclaimed a fish was on, and then, as if to verify the doubted nibble, I got a tug and tussle that stirred the hunting instinct.

My fish weighed eleven pounds; what weight Harry's was we can only guess, but it was a big one, no doubt, as its away-back and downward rush did not cease until it was home amongst the weeds, from which all efforts to move it failed.

'I believe it was the biggest I ever hooked!' was what Harry said, and this was pardonable, as lost fish are always big ones. I handed him my rod to use while I rigged out his afresh, but, before I had finished, he was struggling with a fish bigger than the last—so he thought; this also was lost among the weeds. Again we changed rods that I might replace the loss, and before I had accomplished this, he was grimly tussling with another large one that bent his rod to a threatening angle, and the line spoke as lines do when distressed by a strain in rapid water; but Harry heeded not, as he determined if break there was to be, it should come before the weeds were reached. We got his prize safely in, and its weight of fifteen pounds gave back lost faith to the fisher and the boatmen, who probably had been wishing they had brought their lines. For some time after this our success was uniform with fish of moderate size, but, as it neared the time for lunch, we had some

excitement with two that crossed each other, entangled our lines, and thus got free.

We landed for lunch on a small sandy beach where salmon fishers often haul the nets that were now hanging from the rocks while being repaired. I learned from our men that the huge rents that were being mended were caused by seals, which did not hesitate to take a salmon from out the net, when quite near the shore, and that there were one or two gray-headed rascals that would watch the whole proceedings and then at the last moment snatch a fish.

O'Malley and Lavelle, who had merely lifted a hand in answer to similar greetings from the netsmen on landing, wandered off, when the smoke commenced that followed the lunch, towards their countrymen for a chat, and Harry and I, being curious to see the destruction that seals could work with nets, slowly followed. The group that formed when our men approached the others was a remarkable sample of hardy, rugged manhood, with not a pound of flesh to spare; bone and muscle, furrowed faces, clear, sparkling eyes, and huge, brown hands hemmed Brian in. Could you have seen, as I had hoped, a photo of this group—Harry's effort proved a blur—with the sea at the side and the huge nets hanging from the rocks to form a background, you would have searched each face and stalwart form and concluded that there were patriarchs amongst them almost as old and wonderful as Brian, who, like him, still sought profit for their labours from the sea.

The morning's sport had been so varied by misfortunes that I hoped it would make us more careful of our doings; the mere chance of such happenings should do that, and their happening cause us to become philosophical enough not to feel the need of words that are said to frighten fish, but hasten to put on fresh tackle.

Two netsmen pushed us off and a chorus of voices sang out, 'More luck to yer honours.' The luck came to us while still in sight of them, and they watched the bending rod until it killed its fish. This proved to be the only one inclined to taste what we offered until we were leaving the bay to round Moyteoge Head, and there a strange thing happened. We had caught two, and I was bringing one of some twelve pounds to the gaff, at the sight of which it made a feeble plunge just down out of sight, and as I began to draw it up my winch spun as never a winch of mine had spun before, and for such time that I had no hopes of its stopping while there was any line left on it. The first 100 yards were gone before I could call out, 'Back the boat'; at last, when nearly all was gone, the speed lessened and then stopped. I was lifting my top to learn my whereabouts, when Brian's voice, in quite a low key, said, 'The devil, it's the gray-headed beast,' and he pointed towards a rock near the shore, some 180 yards away, judging by my line, and there was my pollack held in the huge beast's jaw by the middle of its belly. 'Turn the boat, men, and row towards it, and perhaps it will drop the fish,' I said, and by this means I wound in about 100 yards, the beast looking straight at us the while, and holding the fish as a dog would that wished to carry it. He was so holding it when he disappeared again, to make my winch rattle, but not quite to the same tune, as the men rowed with all their might that the line might not all be lost when the break should come. The next appearance of the animal was not more than fifty yards away, so he must have made a turn towards us, or where was the 150 yards of line? His big eyes seemed to say: 'I know I have stolen the fish and I intend to keep it; so row along and leave me undisturbed,' and there he waited for our decision while I was busy winding in the slack. There must have been some little pull upon his jaws from this,

but he took no notice for at least a minute, and by that time I had my loose line in; then he showed he felt my pulling, and went down again, and my anxiety for my line recommenced; and I should have lost it all had not the rowers pulled their utmost in the direction the line was going out. Again the beast showed himself, with my prize still in his mouth, but as we neared him he was down and off again to almost clear my reel once more. Hope came to me as I wound in with my utmost speed, thinking the seal was coming our way, but my winding only brought the sinker, the trace and rubber worm were gone. No doubt the sudden stoppage of his last pull was owing to the lead catching between stones or rocks, thus causing a break that I could not feel, as the jerk would be on the trace beyond the lead. Of course I was pleased with the issue, as I know that when the line is all drawn out by a salmon which you cannot follow, the break that comes is at the knot that fastens the line to the winch. The boatmen seemed relieved, but I fancy it was not so much by the saving of the line as at the severance of all connection with the beast they had talked in Irish at from between set teeth.

Time slips by unheeded when we are employed, be it at sport or work: so busy had we been kept by fortune good and bad that Harry's watch quite startled us, and we had to turn for home before the afternoon seemed half-way through. Pat was waiting our return, and helped to place the fish upon the rocks, and when he saw them all laid out, he said, 'It's Mr Sheridan himself and the gentlemen who would be coming fishing in the same boat that should be seeing them.' Brian hearing this looked to Lavelle, who nodded back, and then he said, 'Will yer honcurs take them?' 'Thank you both, no!' I answered. 'We shall have a picture of them to remind us of the sport you have given us.'

CHAPTER XX

FROM DUGORT TO CLARE ISLAND—‘WHERE TROUBLES DO NOT COME AND RATES ARE NEVER PAID’

OUR two days and three nights stay at the Slieve-more Hotel was made very comfortable by the hostess, and a more jolly man than the host, or one more capable of guiding his guests to what they seek, it would be hard to find; indeed, the only fault he seemed to have was inability to oblige his fishing guests with the rain they so sorely needed.

Our plan was to go from Dugort to Clare Island, via the coast, to where we could get a boat to take us over. As the car stage of this journey was eighteen Irish miles, with no certainty of a boat when at the end of it, we determined on a somewhat early start that we might have a reserve of time to meet that or any other difficulty. It would have been easy to go by train to Westport and from there by boat, but we wanted the drive, which would take us past so many miles of old-world scenes that probably would well repay us for the time it would take.

The mist that shut us in at starting thinned and then disappeared, leaving us with the commencement of a glorious Autumn day that coloured all we saw in cheerful hues. The portions of the drive that wound out and in to meet the widenings and narrowings of Achill Sound gave us constantly varying pictures of land and water, the former filled with busy life. Cabins were sprinkled plentifully where the land had earth to till, showing (as is plain everywhere in this country) the love the Irish have for making the most of even the smallest bit of ground. Struggles for bare existence were often manifest, while fallen roofs and bulging

walls spoke of failures; but, in the main, we were among a happy people that seemingly multiplied apace. Labourers of both sexes were busy making hay, or carrying it, and had happy faces at their work; while colleens with huge bundles of it upon their heads, bundles that had hanging wisps that fell below their knees, showed us their laughing eyes from peep-holes in their burdens. Men and women in age much beyond the allotted span were here capable of work and worked, while barefooted little lads and lasses, well fed and with rosy cheeks, tossed hay and capered joyously.

Riding on a car over roads somewhat rough, high up above the sea, and free from sheltering hedges, had given us appetites that called for some attention, so we asked for a halt where we could get milk to take with our lunch. We drew up in front of a superior cabin that was much longer and had more windows than most of those we had passed, and, as we did so, the door was opened by a woman much above the average height, of middle age, and with a pleasant face. I asked if she would be so kind as to give us some milk. To this she smilingly replied, 'If yer honours will plaise come inside and take saites it's milk in plenty you shall have.'

Irish cabins are not infrequently in the joint occupancy of a numerous family and animals in great variety, but the one we entered had for its only occupants the woman and two children that shyly peeped at us. As we entered, she made a show of dusting chairs for us, and then disappeared, returning with a glass jug of milk which she placed upon a plain deal table just the colour of the milk that by its tinge of yellow showed the cream was there. Having thanked her, I expressed a hope that the fine weather we were having was good for the harvest, and, in reply to this, she said, 'That is so. Shure the good man and the bhoys are about the hay now.'

When we had finished our sandwiches and drunk the milk, there arose the difficulty of a *quid pro quo*. My eyes wandered for inspiration from the plastered ceiling to the sanded floor, over the clean white walls to the well-filled dresser, from the ticking clock to a chest of drawers that had some china on it; but there was nothing I could ask for there; then I spied a spinning-wheel and my hopes went up as I turned to search for a roll of tweed or bundle of stockings—my usual refuge in such a difficulty—but there was nothing, and I could only say 'Thank you' for so much kindness.

In a field close by a stalwart man of fifty, three lads, and two girls, were busy making miniature mounds of hay, which, while permitting drying air to permeate, would shelter the bulk from the burning sun or cast off a shower of rain. The man stretched his back, looked up at the sun, hesitated a moment, and then left the field, followed by the other workers. He had to pass us, and when near said, 'Good-morning, yer honours. I see ye are for giving yer horse a rest.' 'And resting ourselves,' I replied, 'after drinking good milk we have not paid for.' The farmer's smile and shake of his head as he replied, 'Yer honour knows the coin for Irish milk should be given wid yer tongue,' was well worth the journey.

Hours spent in scenes like these gave food for thought to one fresh from the hurry, muddle, and emotionalism of a city, where loud-voiced sentiment had almost made me think that all kinds of sport are wrong, and that we should pray for Chinamen, Africans, and Aliens before praying for ourselves. Noisy faddists, on whom ridicule has no effect, are on the increase, while robust common sense is hidden away until the market for it mends. The female politician, full of projects for my betterment, was on my nerves when I commenced this trip, but I got her off when the fish began to bite. Atlantic breezes must have cleared my brain a bit, as I am thinking

that those who are rearing families of boys and girls, whose needs are few and of such a nature as to help to make strong men and women of them, are doing more for our country's welfare than those good noisy folks that are so anxious to mend our ways.

When we reached the quay at Cloughmore, we learned that the only boat likely to be available that day was away to an adjacent island with the postmaster, who was delivering the mail. The driver, not Pat, but a quieter man, would have unloaded and left us, but, as there was no accommodation near for travellers, I asked him to wait the issue of our conference with the returning postmaster, as it might be that after all we should have to return to Achill railway station.

After about an hour of anxious waiting the boat arrived. It was rowed by a square-built man who manipulated the oars in most effective fashion, and looked so much the sailor in garb and gait that I thought I was venturing much when I asked him if he was the postmaster. He was, and in a very brief space of time he had found a mate; the two trotted with the loads of luggage to the boat, and we were off in much less time than it sometimes takes to ascertain the cost of hiring. The reason of this haste was that there was not a minute to spare if the tide was to help the boat to round the island to where the sails would fill, and failing this help, they would have no chance of returning home that night. Hence the quickest shipment and the most manful struggle I have ever witnessed, a struggle which deserved success. It only just succeeded, the tide turned during the last fifteen minutes, but we reached the wind, the sails filled, and the boat commenced to leave a trail that grew in size. The men had a drink, mopped their brows, and, having rearranged the baggage, lit their pipes, folded their arms, and smoked contentedly.

It was seven o'clock when we entered the little

harbour, and we found our to-be host, Mr J. M'Cabe, on the quay to welcome us. When the luggage was landed, I asked the boatmen to come on shore and have some food, but they shook their heads as they replied, 'We must be off at once,' and they would have gone without had not my host, at my request, hastened for bread and cheese and something in a bottle. When shaking hands with Martin Kilbane, postmaster of Cloughmore, I told him that his quick perception and easily aroused energy fitted him to be an Admiral of the Fleet or Postmaster-General. 'It would be yerself thin that has been kissing the blarney stone, and it's plenty of fish ye'll be catching, I hope.'

The post office, the hotel, and a two-roomed cottage stood together, and formed three sides of a square on the north jetty. It was the cottage that was given us, and our meals were brought to our little sitting-room from across the way; so we were very snug, and so close to the sea that we had only to step outside, slip off our night apparel, and take a morning dip.

It was Sunday morning when we took our first swim, and, the water being warm in anticipation of the heat of the sunny day that followed, we much enjoyed it. A Spring tide was running, and the heaving sea caught varied colourings from the rising sun that glittered in the waves our arms went through. Gulls innumerable were taking toll of passing shoals of little fish, which, when caught, were fought for with noisy clamour. After we had dressed we sat on a wall where the fishers' nets were spread and watched the fish below, which, by their antics, showed that they too were bubbling over with the joy of life. Hunger came to us long before the meal, so we were pleased when our host came to tell us it was ready.

The inhabitants of the island are few, and their means so limited that they share the services of their priest with the occupants of Inishturk, a still less

prosperous island, twelve miles south, which he visits every other week. He was away, and, in consequence of his absence, the male portion of his flock got through the day's devotions very early, and as it is their custom to say 'Good-evening,' after their worship, it was 'Good-evening, yer honours,' soon after eleven that day. By twelve there was a gathering of men near the quay, some of whom I thought invited questioning, so I ventured to ask if our going out in a boat would be displeasing. 'Displaising! it's ourselves that would row yer honours round the island if so it be plaising ye,' and it was then and there arranged we would go round.

Much was done in the hour and a half that intervened between the chartering and our coming on the quay to start. A long boat had been launched, and a number of men stood ready to man her, and were answering to their names as a military policeman, Sergeant Davis, called them out. John Grady was the first to say 'Here,' and then followed John Malley, Pat Grady, Mike Malley, Peter Malley, and Peter Scoffold, but, when Michael Burke's name was called, it was Peter Malley who said, 'Here, sergeant; I see him coming.' The sergeant called Mr John M'Cabe, who stood at attention with his rifle, and answered 'Here'; then the sergeant called himself, and answered 'Here,' as he pulled his rifle to his side; and after that he turned to us, saluted, and called, 'Two gentlemen to see our island that are taking rods with them.' It was a little sad to see the disappointment of those left behind, but hard to understand, seeing that to be on the water could be no treat to them.

The first sight of the boat told me that my flask would be a useless toy amongst such a ship's company, so I whispered Harry to fetch a bottle, which, when opportunity offered, I secretly handed to M'Cabe, telling him the men would expect a taste during such

a long pull. Within a mile of our starting-place three seals were sighted that took such lively interest in our proceedings as enabled the boat to approach well within range, but the bullets went so wide as to cause a rower to remark : 'Indade, it's a dhrop of the crathur the pair of ye are needing.' M'Cabe, who had missed an easy shot, evidently agreed, for, after helping the sergeant, he helped himself, and then corked the bottle and made pretence of putting it away; but this brought so much Irish talk that it ended in each thirsty throat getting what proved to be a thirst provoker. There is some excuse, when a salmon is on the grass, or a stag is killed, to take a nip, but to drink each time a seal is missed was a new experience, that soon made us wish seals were less plentiful or the riflemen more expert. For some time I thought it a wonderful bottle to have contained so much, but later I knew that there were others which possibly the men we left behind had seen; hence their sorrowing faces.

When we reached the point and faced the open, we found the waves had each a notion of its own as to the direction it would take, and to get their way, they jostled one another in such angry fashion as made a loppy sea. Now and then a huge wave would override all obstacles and come at us threateningly, but our boat would glide up with a lurch, to fall down the other side with another lurch in the opposite direction. In one of these descents John Grady's oar failed to get a grip, and he lost his balance. He fell upon his back, but when he got his seat again he was pressing his Sunday waistcoat as if the pain was under that; and so it proved. Bow was the next to be affected, and the boat with fewer oars made less progress but danced the more. The sergeant proved himself a resourceful man, and quickly saw the necessity of filling bow's seat if we were to round the island, and himself volunteered to take it; he rose to do so

and then sat down again. Mr M'Cabe was roused at this and nearly rose, and I have no doubt would have aided much if he had reached his destination at the other end, but the need passed away with bow seating himself to his work again.

The grandeur of this headland, the rocks of which tower up from depths below to heights where your eye can scarcely reach from a boat that is being tossed by the waters at their base, would have impressed me more had the waves been kinder and not played such havoc with the crew.

Mike Malley, stroke, fought a noble fight with his inner self and conquered. I was sitting opposite him, and was interested from start to finish. He wasted no breath in talking while wrestling with the foe, although his cheeks puffed out as if he had much to say. I was glad to see him smile once more—not a great effort—and hear him say: 'It's the currints here that would make the devil himself sorry if he iver wint to say, and sure yer honour would be bad yerself if ye hadn't kept the whisky in ye.' Perhaps it was the tossing that upset the crew, for when we turned the next headland and had smoother water, every man of them was himself again, and there was talk of shooting. I am not fond of the gun in a boat; I have shot enough to have respect for the death-dealing instrument on land, and think it out of place in a crowded boat, so I said, 'Let my son show you how we catch our fish.' The men were very interested in the tackle, and more so in what would happen if a pollack of any size should seize hold of it. Their anxiety to hasten that event caused them to put an earnestness in their pull that sent the boat along much too fast, and some time was lost in bringing them to the proper speed with so many oars at work. I saw the rod tip bend in answer to a nibble at the undefended tail of the rubber worm, a taste of which is generally fatal, as it proved in this case; the dis-

appointed fish came again and took the whole of it, and the answering swish hooked it firmly.

No son of mine was likely to reach Harry's age (twenty-five) without experience with a rod, and it is more than possible I was feeling a little vain while watching the rowers who, with arms upon their oars and heads at accommodating angles, strained their eyes to see where the fine blue line was pointing. When an eleven-pound fish resulted I was pleased, but the man most excited was our host, and Harry added to his excitement by handing him the rod for the next effort. Mr M'Cabe had never used a rod; he had been accustomed to catch his fish with a cord line strong enough to take a pig to market, so no wonder he made a muddle by taking from the winch the two fingers which he had been told were necessary to help the skid when a big fish came on, as the ordinary brake might prove insufficient, and lost his lure. By the time I had repaired the damage Harry was ready with the second rod, so both were started, Harry saying, as he let his out, 'Now, Mr M'Cabe, let's see which will have the first fish on board.' The novice proved a most apt pupil, and not only made the first capture, but during the hour the rising wind permitted them to fish got eight to Harry's seven, the only aid he had from me being advice as to the length of line, which meant the depth the lure would reach. I mention this as it may occur to some that, given such tackle as we were using, Mr M'Cabe or any other man would be successful.

Before the sun has risen, and after it has set, pollack rise from amongst the weeds to roam in search of food, and, if you get amongst them then, you will find them the boldest biters and catch them with most indifferent tackle; but, how to catch them when the sun is high, the sea calm, the water bright, and it is pleasant to the faintest heart to be in a boat, is worth some study. It may be that you have solved the

problem, but there are others who, if I don't tell them, will write for full particulars of the tackle I think best, and information as to how I get to know the proper depths to fish. Some will forget the stamp, or, remembering it, fear to hurt me. Now let it be known that I esteem a plainly directed envelope, duly stamped, and always do my best to make it worth its cost. Friars Stile Lodge, Richmond, will find me.

Sport is too nearly allied to slaughter where neither skill nor endurance is a need. Who cares to shoot a semi-tame stag, however grand a head, and is there much to boast of after a record day with hand-reared pheasants or pinioned duck? Is it not true that you must give the quarry the fullest chance to get the greatest pleasure from its capture?

It may help some if I give a description of the tackle we use:—

Rods.—6 feet 6 inches. One is of bamboo and the other green-heart, fitted with porcelain rings.

Winch.—Diameter, 5 inches; depth, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

Lines.—Plaited silk, dyed dark blue with Maypole soap, and, when dry, filled with liquid mutton fat. Mark them at 20 and 30 yards.

Leads.—To the line is attached a Geen's lead that has a swivel at each end. They are made in all sizes from $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce to 6 ounces.

Trace.—The trace is of annealed wire, 5 feet in length, with sufficient spring to keep it straight, and yet so pliable that it can be twisted four times round when forming the loops that fasten it to the lead and lure. This wire is blackened when made, and is so fine that it is less visible than gut.

Baits.—Rubber worms are undoubtedly by far the best all-round bait. The red rubber is more generally preferred, but towards evening and on dark days I have found white more killing, while on very bright days black will sometimes call them

when others fail. The Natural Spin is very successful in deep water and on dark days.

The four days that followed our Sunday fishing were bright and sunny, and the sea so calm that we were rowed, as we desired, in different directions on each occasion, so as to try fresh ground. On the third day I asked our host to join us and take my rod, and it was then that he really learned that what tended most to give us sport was a knowledge of the depths. To surprise him, I kept the secret of how I had become possessed of this advantage so long as my early morning's reading of a chart answered, and, after that, showed him a rough copy of the portion we were travelling over, no bigger than my hand, that told me all the depths for six sea-miles.

M'Cabe is quite a sportsman and quick-witted, so I was not surprised that he asked how I knew when the bait was at the proper depth. I prefer to give a fuller answer here to this than was necessary to him while he was fishing. The speed of the boat is a matter of much moment; it should be such as will cause the passing water to spin the lure and make it appear to be in a hurry to escape. To effect this the water needs to be travelling past the boat at two miles an hour; the boat may be making little progress, or perhaps none; I sometimes anchor in rapid, desirable spots. When M'Cabe asked his question, I answered, 'We are in four fathoms and we have twenty yards of line out that have six-ounce leads to sink them, which I have no doubt brings them to within half a fathom of the bottom; pay out six yards more of line and see what will happen.' He did, and got the expected pull, and, when he wound in, there was a piece of weed on the hook in proof that we had been fishing at the depth desired. I will give a letter of his to show how our success moved him to a desire to give up his hand-lines in favour of a rod and fine tackle.

'Clare Island,
Westport, Mayo,
Sept. 25th, 1905.

'I am writing to ask if you will kindly, on your return home, get for me a rod, line, traces, and lures, for which I should be much obliged to you, and will send a cheque immediately I know the cost. "Did you get any of the gentlemen's baits?" is being constantly asked. From time immemorial the only bait used here has been the freshwater eel, but your success at all times of the day, while we have never thought of trying except early or late, has quite wakened us up to try your methods. I hope you are having good sport at Roundstone; indeed, I wish you and your son such a happy time that you will want to come again.—Yours faithfully,

'J. J. M'CABE.'

We thought much of Clare Island, and desire to recommend it to those who would wish for a glorious time where troubles do not come, where rates are never paid; where the people are most obliging, fish plentiful, and Atlantic breezes come from every quarter. It is quite an easy journey. If you travel with the mail from Euston (eight forty-five p.m.) you will be at Dublin at six a.m., at Westport eleven forty-five a.m., and, if thereafter you stick to the mail bags, you will be across and fishing before the day is out.

CHAPTER XXI

FROM CLARE ISLAND TO INISHTURK ON A STORMY SEA
—DOING AN OVERLAND JOURNEY IN STATE—
CAPTAIN DARBY GREEN.

DURING the night preceding the morning we had chosen to leave Clare Island for Inishturk the wind changed and freshened so much that I was glad we had decided on one of the larger fishing boats for the journey.

Edward O'Malley, Hugh Kill, and the boy, all good sailors, had readily consented to forgo their fishing for what they anticipated would be a pleasant sail, but when we met them at the jetty in the morning O'Malley inclined his head sideways towards me and said, 'Bit fresh, sorr.' Owners of other boats came down, looked seawards, and, having apparently satisfied themselves, turned back, took a glance at their craft, dug their hands deeper into their trousers pockets, and marched off home.

We started with a reef or two in the sails, but before we had been out long or made much progress, more were taken in, and soon after that a sail was furled. The men took a peep at us to see how we were faring, or possibly to gather from our looks if we had thoughts of turning back. If this was the question they desired to ask, it was answered by our rising and helping each other into oilskins to protect ourselves from the increasing spray.

It was certainly a wet journey, and the outlook as we neared the island was the reverse of bright. The huge waves that rolled under us hurled themselves against the rocks, and the resounding roars that came

back were anything but promising for a landing ; but I so much wanted to complete the trip we came to Ireland for, that I determined that if we had to return the order should come from the men, who knew the possibilities, unaided by any hint of mine. We had not long to wait for this. There was a conference in Irish, and the English that resulted was, 'We are sorry to disappoint you, jintlemen, but there's no landing on the island with this sea.' A moment's thought and I asked, 'Could you get a landing at Inishbofin?' There was another short conference, and then we were told that we could be landed only at the fishing harbour on this side of the island. I asked, 'How far will that be from the hotel?' to learn that it was not more than two miles, so decided to go on there.

We had a rough time of it, but quite a comfortable landing, where idle men—made so by the weather outside—gave willing help. I paid our men quickly, as they were in a hurry to do their passage home, and then turned to seek a means to get our luggage to the hotel.

The fishers' cabins formed quite an artistic crescent round the sandy bay, and looked so prosperous that I anticipated no difficulty in getting a cart, but it was a panniered donkey that was brought, whose back began to bend before half the load was on it. I protested, but the owner tried to reassure me, saying, 'Shure and it's her way to make it aisey to load her.'

'Is this the only donkey we can have?' was answered with, 'Shure and it's plinty of donkeys we have.'

'Then, please fetch two,' I said, to which Harry added, 'Yes, two more, please, for we would do this overland journey in state, so that mine host at the other end may be impressed and give us of his best.'

'Be jabers, if it's three donkeys we are for taking it's the same will be six when he sees them.'

I looked at Pat as severely as I could for explanation.

'Shure thin it's not for displasing jintlemen I am

talking; it's yer honours that are not seeing the fun I am shpaking av.'

I certainly did not.

The three donkeys varied much in size. In the rear was a large animal carrying our two leather trunks, stuck on end, one in each pannier. The female donkey, that had bent her back so obligingly to help her loaders, was in the centre, and carried all the sundries. The front of the position was occupied by a little animal that had the rod box—that had looked so large at Dugort—pointing threateningly much beyond his ears and backward far beyond his tail. A little crowd had gathered to see the strange show make a start to ascend the hill, and, strange and funny as it was, Irish politeness saved the situation from laughter or audible remarks.

The driver was level in his attention to the animals, both with stick and tongue, and now and then favoured me with a little talk that was principally in riddles which he appeared to think would solve themselves; and they did. The journey was not so long as I had apprehended, for in Ireland two miles may mean any distance. In this case it meant just two miles, that were quickly got over, and we found ourselves in front of the house we had been so tossed about in reaching. The landlord came in answer to my knock, and I asked him if he could accommodate my son and self with bedrooms for a few days, but I failed to learn whether he understood me, as his gaze roamed up and down the little line of donkeys a lengthened time, and then with bowed head he disappeared, I presumed for a conference, and we waited until, out of patience, I knocked again. A stout, red-faced woman came next, to whom I repeated my wish, and, seeing her lips move, I expected a vocal answer, but she only shook her head, and then she too disappeared. I turned to Pat and asked him if he thought they were really full. He smiled, a very broad smile, and

answered, 'Devil a doubt of it, yer honour, they're full to the bung.'

'Which way now, Pat? We must apply elsewhere.'

The answer I got was disconcerting,—

'Begorra, then it's not meself that'll be knowing where that'll be unless yer honours will be for going back to where ye landed and have me cabin and welcome.'

I have no idea how I looked at this, but the situation evidently appealed to Harry, for he burst out laughing and said, as he shook with it, 'It's worth the journey to see your face, dad; it's just lovely.'

Ignoring my son's remarks, I said, 'Thank you, Pat, for your kind offer, but I will get a boat and cross over to the mainland.'

We were on the little quay in sight of boats that bobbed at anchor and others stranded on the beach. We looked at them and then at each other, and I was forced to admit we should need something a trifle larger. Pat said coaxingly, 'It's back to me cabin ye'll be going, sorr.' One last longing look at the boats brought my eyes to a point of land that jutted out and partly hid the offing, and there I saw a sail that soon brought a craft to view which might have a captain whom I could prevail upon to take us off. We found that she was loaded with porter and captained by Mr Darby Green. He was a sandy-whiskered, red-faced, stuggy, unprepossessing man that snapped at me when I asked him if he could take us across, 'I'm going to discharge this cargo before I leave this quay, and that won't be to-night.' With that he threw another rope to the man on shore.

I would not see his ugly face nor hear his snarls, but continued to speak to him as if assured that he would ultimately give way, and I admired the little vessel; she seemed designed for rough weather, and this prompted me to say, 'She is trim and snug, captain,

and must be worth looking at when she has a sea she likes.

The man faced round, lifted his shaggy eyebrows, and looked at me with large, blue-gray eyes that had a wealth of depth which, when looked into, transformed him; and, as I looked, I saw my point was gained, and that he would take us to the mainland loaded as he was.

I had asked before starting what I should pay him, but only got for answer, 'There is a sea running outside, and it may be we shall not go far, but, if I get you over and can get back again, I won't be for asking too much for obliging gentlemen in difficulties.'

The sea ran high, but the little ship, in spite of being full of weighty casks, lifted herself and topped the waves in such a perky fashion that we were bound to notice and admire her. Now and then the foaming edges of one higher than the rest would hustle her a bit and souse her passengers, but she kept her course in such plucky fashion as told she would fetch Claggan pier.

The certainty of being freed from Inishbofin was a tonic that made me gay, in spite of my having to hold grimly to a rope to maintain my somewhat sprawling position on the deck, and, by way of giving vent to my delight, I poked Harry's ribs with an elbow and sang to him :—

‘A wet sheet and a flowing sea,
A wind that follows fast,
And fills the white and rustling sail,
And bends the gallant mast.’

When near our destination, having in mind not to delay the vessel at the pier, I asked again, 'What shall I pay you, captain?' and, in reply, he stated a sum which he expressed a hope would not hurt us greatly. It was too small to hurt, and small enough, with all else, to make me decide for the thousandth time how unwise it is to judge a fellow-man too quickly.

No! Darby Green, of Ballinabay, Clifden, is not ugly; he does not snarl, and he has two gems of eyes that sparkled when we admired the behaviour of his boat.

We stood some time where he had landed us watching the manœuvres of his boat to keep her sails full while beating out, and then I turned to take stock of our position. I was doing this when Harry came up to me, untied the strings of my south-wester, and helped me out of my oilskin garments, and, while doing so, remarked, 'There's been a lot of piers and luggage in this day's doings, dad.'

There were a number of men very near us packing mackerel, but so directly under the eyes of one in authority that no one looked our way.

I have known men made joyous and not a little proud by having handed to them a Bradshaw to solve a problem. My travelling joy is a map. I took one from my pocket, and saw we were about seven miles from Clifden, the place where the proprietor of the Dudley Arms, A. F. Macdonnell, had cared so well for friends of mine, that all I felt in need of now was a car to take us to him.

We piled our luggage and marched off in search of one, found it quickly, and had some tea while it was being horsed by a real Irish trotter that made the miles speed past in such a fashion that in less than an hour we were sitting down to a first-class dinner, with just the man sitting next to me, had I known him, I should have most desired to meet.

The landlord had told me in a most confidential tone that the gentleman who would be dining with us was Mr Shimmer, a Congested Districts' Board Inspector, who had been a captain in the Merchant Service. That Mr Shimmer was an observant man was soon apparent, for we were no sooner seated than he said, 'I see you have come to fish. May I ask where you intend to try your luck?'

I told him where we had been and of our day's doings.

'Rough diamond, Darby Green, but of the right water. You were lucky to get here to-night, Mr Geen.'

'And delighted, I assure you, Mr Shimmer.'

'You could not have seen my name on a box, Mr Geen, as I did yours. Perhaps Macdonnell has told you my business, too.'

'He has, and I am hoping to get information from you that will prevent our being stranded on another Inishbofin.'

After dinner we adjourned to the landlord's sanc-tum, where we had a most enjoyable chat. 'The Chairman of our Board and the Chief Secretary for Ireland were at Clare Island a few days since; did you see them?' said Mr Shimmer.

'Yes, we did,' I said, 'and were much amused by their doings. They first inspected Grace O'Malley's castle, but their stay inside was for a moment only, and then all their followers went in and came out as quickly. I was not surprised, for my son and I had come out from there in great haste. The chief interest seemed centred on, I should say "in," the empty fish casks on the quay. The right honourable gentleman looked into quite a number, and, wherever his nose went, your chairman's followed, and, after his, all the other noses. Quite an imposing procession started, with determined strides, to climb the hill to get a general view of the Board's work, but the determination of the start lessened rather quickly, and soon ended in a halt and turn that brought it down again. An inspection was then made of the boats on shore. The Government's representative had a most ready method of testing these: he struck them with his stick and then listened for the answer. So impressed was the tail of the procession with this that other sticks were used and other ears listened. The sticks,

no doubt, were brought ashore for the long walk, and came in quite handy for this other purpose. After this they filled the waiting boats and were taken off to the steamer.'

'I am afraid you are a little lacking in perception of the serious side when on your fishing tours; are you not, Mr Geen?'

'Mr Shimmer, I am a great respecter of the grand work your Board is doing; I saw a lot of it in Donegal last year, but I could not help smiling, nor could you, had you seen the seriousness with which they played the game of follow-my-leader.'

'Dad must be lacking on his serious side,' said Harry, 'or he would not have sat on a wall pretending not to notice, while all the time he was giving squeezes to my knee and whispering, "Oh ! Harry, look at that!"'

"Oh, Harry, look at this!" "Oh, Harry, if another nose goes into that barrel I shall tumble off backwards and be drowned." Certainly the leisurely way the line of visitors entered the castle was in striking contrast to their exit, and gave dad's funny side such a start that he lost his chance of improving the occasion by pointing out to me into what high places ambition leads.'

This son of mine can so use his face as to give colouring to his speech, and its comical expression when saying 'high places' in connection with Grace O'Malley's castle started laughter that was prolonged by his appearance of surprise that his remarks should have caused it.

'Now, Mr Shimmer, may I ask you for your promised advice as to our further journeyings; we thought of having a day in the bay here, and then driving on to either Slyne Head or Roundstone.'

'Well, Mr Geen, I think I can prevent your making useless journeyings, and I can suggest a route where you will be sure of sport and a degree of comfort that should meet the requirements of a sportsman. To

begin here, you should secure Michael Welsh's boat to sail you well out in the bay here, but I fear the fish will run small; we are so far inland, and as no doubt you are aware, you must be in the open sea for large pollack. Slyne Head is ten miles from here; there you would find a decent hotel and a clever fisherman, Pat Devan. At Roundstone you would be exceedingly comfortable with Mr and Mrs Millet, of the Ivy Hotel—a private house really—with whom I often stay; mention my name to them, and ask Millet to get Pat Jennings for your sea-fishing. Carna is much frequented by fishermen, and Mongan's Hotel is the one to stay at, and, should you desire to go farther, a drive or sail will take you to Orr's Hotel, Cashla Bay.'

When we thanked him heartily for his help, he protested that it was just the matter he felt most capable of advising upon, and therefore the pleasure was his; and then added, 'Have you ever fished the Erriff River at Leenane?'

'Yes,' I answered, 'and I should like to tell you of a visit I paid there, when accommodation in Irish hotels was rather indifferent, and the landlords of them had very vague notions of fair dealings with their guests.'

'Fill our glasses, Macdonnell, and it may be it will be to your advantage to listen to Mr Geen's views of hotels and their landlords.'

CHAPTER XXII

'THE DRAWING-ROOM FLURE'—THE RIVER EERRIFF
FOR SALMON AND LOUGH NAFOEY FOR PIKE—
UP ON A CONNEMARA MOUNTAIN FOR GROUSE.

A SEA-CAPTAIN who has been thanked for valuable information and has readjusted himself upon his seat after a sip at a replenished glass, with a satisfied air and a long clay pipe, makes a comfortable picture; at least, so I thought when I looked at him, as I commenced what I intended should be a brief account of my visit to Leenane; but he and our host so encouraged me by interposing comments that—my son giving me no restraining kick—I told it as written here.

It is just twenty years ago that my friend, Mr Emery, in whose judgment I place implicit faith, said, 'Geen, will you go with me to Connemara? Graham was going, but has had to drop out through illness. I have planned everything, and am assured the prospects are good for fishing, and, mark you! grouse shooting is promised should the river fall too low.'

Free salmon fishing, within a mile of the sea, where fresh-run fish may come with every tide, was a prospect that moved me; with grouse shooting added on the same terms it became irresistible, and I said 'Yes' at once. Of course I ought to have been very sorry for the poor fellow who should have shared all this; I quite forget whether I was so or not, but I certainly felt delighted at the thought of a holiday during which my friend and I might catch salmon or kill grouse as the fancy moved us. Emery is a clever fisher, a most excellent companion, and is full of the resource, ingenuity, and cheerfulness that were so necessary to angling visitors to Ireland at

that time. It is quite usual to hear people say, 'Oh ! let Emery manage, and there will be no trouble.' He had left little to chance : beds and beats had been arranged weeks prior, so we had only to move in on the appointed day. This we did, to find that others had moved in either earlier on that day or some time previous.

The hotel was not the huge structure that now stands on the spot, but, next after a limited number of bedrooms, there was a drawing-room; and then, following in importance, a dining-room. We slept in the dining-room the first night; believe me, if you can, not from choice, although there was much that was very choice—choice smells of baked, boiled, and fried, choice groans, choice snoring, and choice wishes. A night of such purgatory is cheaply bought if, ever after, you feel more grateful for a sweet, soft bed. I was so truly grateful when in one the next night that I almost desired to keep awake to enjoy the comfort of it.

Leenane is near the house in which a whole family, named Joyce, was killed by Fenians, and Miss Balfour having paid a visit to the spot soon after, a fact much noticed by the Press, caused ladies innumerable and various to show their courage by following her example; hence the spasmodic rushes such as that which robbed us of our beds. These females, fresh ones every day, worried me with their loud talk of how to manage things. Now and then a sweeter female voice from amongst the crowd would catch the ear and call the eye, but, oh, my ! what variations in voice and gesture the masculine, travelling woman has. There was a large assembly of them at the dinner-table on the third day after our arrival, and we might have been much edified by their conversation, up to a certain period, had the ladies been content to talk one at a time; but when that period came we were given something to think about that concerned us personally. The waiter, with a hand on Emery's

chair and one on mine, with his head craned forward in the space above our shoulders to watch the effect of his words, spoke to us in his most Irishly-persuasive voice, 'Shure thin you jintlemin will be shlaping on the dhrawing-room flure to-night.'

Pat made much of 'dhrawing-room flure,' as no doubt he desired us to know it was a very superior place, and then, after a pause, and with a slight bend of his head, he added, 'and it will be ladies thimselves that will be shlaping in the beds.' I assure all and sundry that it was quite a shy eye that ran round the table to see which amongst the many ladies was to occupy my berth. Of course I was baffled in my search, but I gallantly determined I would say to either of them—as I was in duty bound—'Madam, take my bed, take my room, you are welcome to both, as I have a fancy for the "dhrawing-room flure" to-night.' Then I turned to Emery, and from his face I guessed that his thoughts were with the landlord who had sent the message rather than with the ladies. My guess was right, for he rose up at once and said, 'Leave this to me, Geen.' But I was not inclined to let him beard the lion in his den alone, so insisted on accompanying him. Apologies we found in numbers, but these Emery brushed aside until close quarters were reached as to whom the rooms belonged to and, finally, whose hotel it was. Here I interposed with, 'May I ask, Mr Landlord, where you yourself are hoping to sleep to-night?' and, on his replying, 'In my bed,' I offered the suggestion that the ladies should have his room; but he would not take it. Then Emery, ever direct, and sometimes suspicious, said to him, 'Tell us which of the ladies desire our rooms, and perhaps we shall be able to arrange matters.' This was a poser, and brought out the truth that they were fifteen miles away, at Westport, waiting a wire to come on. So this pother was ended by our keeping our rooms.

Leenane stands at the head of Killary Bay, near the point where the River Erriff joins it, and is therefore convenient both for the sea and the river fisher. At the time of our arrival the stream ran in full flood, but on the second day it had subsided to fair volume, and was of that slightly dusky colour that helps so much to successful fishing. The river has a short course and a quick fall, and therefore almost daily rain is needed to keep it in trim, but it is, notwithstanding, an ideal salmon river for its size, as there are numerous deep pools to hide them, and miles of gravel shallows for their beds.

Fortune favoured us with the needed rain during the whole of our first week, and, as fish were abundant and not transferable to our homes in England, salmon appeared on the table at nearly every meal, until, with the hope of varying our fish diet, we determined on a visit to Lough Nafooey for pike. This day's outing was eminently pleasurable, made so at its start by the lovely drive, during which we were kept quite excited by the accounts of the monsters that there was more than a probability of our capturing. Then, again, Emery was elated on learning that there was a chance of gillaroo trout, on which he had set his desire, in the stream that connects Lough Nafooey with Lough Mask.

When on the lough, with the baits spinning, little time passed without excitement, and now and then a fish. Emery had tugs from fish we much wanted to know the weight of; one of them was quite a monster, for, when it turned, it showed something of its size to me; but the heaviest we got weighed just thirteen pounds.

We left the pike fishing early to get the much-desired trout, and succeeded in getting a few, one of which Emery opened to satisfy himself as to this fish's peculiar possession—a birdlike crop, holding, in this case, food and grit to grind it.

We took some trouble to make the landlord understand that our captures were worthy of his cook's attention, but he shifted all responsibility by taking me to the kitchen and introducing me to her in such a way as made my task most difficult. 'Annie,' said he, 'the gentleman has come to tell you how to cook fish.' This was little likely to help me, but, as often happens when hardest driven, your good fairy whispers you the turn to take. Thus inspired, I walked boldly up to Annie with the fish, and smiled against her frown for a moment, and then held out my hand. The frown slowly vanished, and I was soon telling her, among other things, how we cook jack in England. I remember, to this day, how loud the visitors were in praise of the fish which Annie cooked as she would have done a joint of veal.

It appeared, for a time, that our guns and cartridges would prove superfluous luggage, for the landlord, unmindful of his promise to give us shooting, had let his grouse moor to a party of lawyers and barristers from Dublin, who, on account of the wet and stormy weather that had suited the fishing well, had obtained indifferent sport, and, to make their prospect of getting the head of game at first expected still less bright, two of their party had been called home for a time. The host's information regarding the shooting had put me out more than the temporary loss of my bed.

A gun helps me on the longest tramp, and, if my early training did anything for me, I ought to be able to so deport myself with it as to give no fear to the most nervous comrade. My good dad took never-tiring pains to teach me this before he showed me how to take a coming or a going bird, a rising or a falling one.

I was thinking unkindly of the landlord, no doubt with a clouded face, when the shooters were starting on that morning. Now, whether my looks betrayed my thoughts, I cannot say, but one of the party came

to me and said, 'I understand you brought a gun with you expecting some shooting. Will you come with us to-day?' His was just the voice to make the invitation welcome; such a voice as would make a man or woman desirous of seeing the speaker's face a second time. It is upon the cards that, hungering though I was for a day amongst the grouse, I should have said to either of the others, 'Thanks! it is very kind of you to ask me, but I prefer the fishing.' Yet, to this man, I eagerly said, 'Oh! I should be delighted.'

How it came about that I was given the topmost position I did not ask, but marched off under the guidance of a youthful Pat and a dog (I knew to whose insistence I owed the latter), to reach my lofty starting-point, whence the next gun seemed very distant, divided from me by a broad space of almost perpendicular, shaly rock. At a given signal, which the boy saw, he directed me forward, and very soon reports that echoed in the hollows of the mountain-side below, and then again above me, told that the day's sport was on.

When the boy released the dog, the animal took a peep at me and the instrument I carried, and then wagged his tail, but he did not come to my proffered hand; he turned his nose to business with a jerk that said, 'No time now for that.' It was impossible to doubt that the man whose words and manner had brought me where I was had given me a dog that knew his work. The heather was scanty in places, and there was only a belt of some thirty yards in width, with bare rocks on either side, and, as the little wind there was came to us, the dog's work was not difficult, but the ease and truth with which he did it was the saving feature of my position. Crack! crack! many times repeated came up in the first half-hour, during which I had twice refused hares that in their scampering up offered easy shots. At last the dog's action said, 'Look out, your turn

has come,' and I brought down a right and left in spite of my having to take them while resting against my kneeling leg, while the other, with its foot somewhere down below, propped me up. The boy's interest in the proceedings, that had died out when I allowed the hares to pass, took fresh life; the dog looked happy, and I fear the shooter was unduly puffed out with pride. To shoot hares going up or grouse going forward would not elate me, but try your hand at birds that rise only inches above the heather and then drop down a mountain-side, and, if you succeed in killing clean, what you will feel is what I felt. Pride often lends itself to failure, and my pride gave me away at my next attempt. I waited just a moment to increase the distance, and the birds dropped under me to where I could not bring my gun. The dog seemed conscious as to why I had failed to fire, as after that he used all his cunning to get below the birds and cause them to make a rise that enabled me to take them as one does pigeons coming from a trap.

Birds were anything but plentiful; they could scarcely be expected in great numbers where cover and food were scanty, but the good dog made the very best of all his chances, and I was pleased with my day for grouse well up on a Connemara mountain.

The relation of my Leenane experiences had carried us on to near bedtime, and as we proposed making an early fishing start, we were not long in saying 'Good-night' and 'Good-bye' to our friend in need, Captain Shimmer, whom we had cause to bless many times thereafter.

We secured the services of Michael Welsh, who, with the help of a mate, sailed his boat to perfection in a stiffish breeze over the few and far between dark patches of the mostly sandy-bottomed Ardbear Bay, but, as had been predicted, the fish were far too small to test our lines, so the excitement of our previous doings was lacking.

On ordinary days, although happy and health-giving, I must not dwell, as I need my pen for more stirring times, accounts of men and women whom we met, and incidents which I have notes of. Let it be enough to say that those who would like such comfortable sport as this inland bay affords will be at ease in the Dudley Arms Hotel at Clifden.

From a livery yard opposite our hotel I had seen well-horsed cars come, and, as my love of horses is on a par with my hate of whips, except to show the animal or stroke his back, I went across to tell the man in charge what I had seen, and ask if he would let my son and me ride behind a good one to Roundstone. Spectacles as a rule detract somewhat from the expression of a face, and Irishmen are the last I would wish to wear them; but the roguish look that came over the top of the pair this man had on was added to by the slow one-sided bending of his head to get a peep at me. When he had satisfied himself, his head resumed its ordinary position, and his lips, that had quivered as if expecting a laugh to come to them, moved to say, 'Been in Ireland long?' At this we both laughed, and as this was what we had tried not to do, it did us good.

Whether we got the best horse from the stable I cannot say, but I did not wish for a better one than the handsome creature that trotted us over the road that made its way by many a twist between lakes that left margins only just sufficient for our passage, and on which we saw spreading rings in such numbers as proved them well stocked with fish. After these came a lengthy chain of little lakes threaded together by a sun-gilded stream; the whole a lovely, silver pendant, dropped in a desolate bog that has been made hideous by trenches from which peat has been taken, leaving ugly blackened stumps of forest trees exposed.

It was pleasing after several miles of such desolation

for the road to take a turn that brought the bay in sight on which Roundstone stands.

Irish drivers frequently ease the pace a bit when a mile from goal so that they may come with a dash and 'Woa ! woa ! my beauty !' at the finish. Our driver did this, and his coaching through the main street was much admired, as also was his pull up and 'Woa ! then !' in front of the hotel.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PIG FAIR AT ROUNDSTONE—PAT JENNINGS SPOILS HIS MARKET FOR POLLACK

ROUNDSTONE is more like a small, old-fashioned, English market town than any other place in Ireland that I have visited. Its broad main street of prosperous shops, its commercial hotel and superior private houses looking out on a bay, beyond which is the broad Atlantic, while at the back are high hills of limestone, dotted with lakes, make it a pleasant and healthy place at which to stay. A glance at a map will show that an angler will have lakes innumerable to visit that are high up above the sea whence breezes will come to give vigour to the arm that wields a rod.

Much has been written to prove that there are more places in Ireland, in proportion to population, where spirits may be purchased than in any other country, and statistics tend to show that licences are granted where the need cannot go far beyond that of the petitioner and his relatives, and in Roundstone such must surely be the case. Why there should be so many puzzled me, until our host explained that to be trusted with a licence was regarded more as an honour by the holder than as a source of profit, and that it had been found difficult to grant it to one

and deny it to another. If there could be a time in all the year to justify such opportunity to go from house to house to sample, it must have been the day of our arrival, when the town was full of Irishmen dressed in their best. It was pig-fair day, a holiday to the men, for it was the ladies that held the ropes that had pigs' legs attached to them. I could not see a man so employed.

Many pigs, with their bodies and legs in sacks, were brought from distant islands in boats rowed by men who, when the noisy freights were landed, thrust their hands beneath their coat tails, raised their noses above the level of such business, and stalked loftily away, leaving their spouses to do the dealing. While watching a most heroic struggle between a full-sized woman and a monster pig that threatened to snap the rope or pull a ham off, I thought unkindly of the husband who never even looked round to see the issue of the tug-of-war; indeed, who could have helped whispering as I did, 'You brutes, to leave your women so?' But, before the fair was over, I was quite convinced that women as a rule, and not men, should take pigs to market.

I feel some interest in a display of skill in business deals, and have watched with admiration the selling of a horse by a past master in the art, and I admire the ready and truthful man who, when selling a kicking cow, in answer to the query, 'Is she a good milker?' replied, 'It's tired you'll be before you've done milking her.' But the Irish pig-dealer has no equal, unless it be the Irishwoman with whom he has to deal.

It appeared at first that the pigs would be far in excess of the demand, and that buyers were calmly waiting for sellers to realise this and then to get them at their own price; very possibly this attitude would have imposed upon the absent husbands, but it seemed to have the opposite effect upon the women-folk.

Somewhere near the centre of the greatest crowd

a middle-aged woman, tall and straight, with her face above the shoulders of her nearest neighbours, showed a set-purpose mien that told she had a price she meant to get for the huge white pig which tugged in vain at the rope she held. Her prize seemed to attract each dealer as he was about to pass until they all seemed bidding for her pig, and, I think it may be said, its purchase was the real starting of the fair; but I have some suspicion that it was not the pig they coveted so much as the absence of its owner's face, which was up so high that women far and near could see it and feel encouraged to be firm.

The departure of this giantess and her monster pig brought to view a pretty face overhung with modesty, and, strange to see, the pig she held was modest too, and sat upon his hind quarters while standing upon his fore legs with drooping head between them, as a dog sometimes does when waiting the next move. They both seemed sadly out of place, and jarred so much upon my nerves that it would have relieved me to have held the pig for her until the crack of—well! her husband's skull for leaving her to a task she was so unfitted for. Offers came to her, and hands were held out to clench the bargainings, but they were declined with 'No, and thank you,' that was easily seen by the movement of her little mouth. For some time this picture was hidden by a pushing woman whose bare feet and legs proclaimed that she had not stayed to pick her way through soft, peaty places to reach the fair.

Business grew in briskness, and the satisfied departures, amongst which was that of the boggy-legged one, thinned the market-place, and again the young woman and her pig stood out quite boldly, so that I could see her 'No' to offers as plainly as before. The artful buyers presently passed her by, and I began to fear that, like my Aunt Jane in matters matrimonial, she had overstood her market, but I am glad to say

she sold her pig at last, and, with its sale, my interest in the fair waned and died.

Mr and Mrs Millet, who keep the Ivy Hotel, Roundstone, Connemara, are a hale and hearty couple who have reared a family of sons and daughters and sent them out into the world to fight the battle. Their doing this has left them with room and inclination to entertain guests in a fashion that deserves the praise bestowed on them by Mr Shimmer. Mrs Millet's thoughts are not so completely with her absent ones as to cloud her face or to leave no room for mindful interest in her visitors; her smile is ever ready to throw sunshine on her kindly face, be your requirements what they may if within the resources of the town. In addition, she has this great virtue—she does not talk too much.

Our host proved to be a well-read man and an interesting conversationalist, from whom it was an easy task to get information, especially on matters piscatorial, as he is an enthusiastic angler. He readily told us where to go, what flies to use, and, what is more, insisted on taking from his fly-book half a dozen of his favourites for us. In illustration of the sport to be got he instanced a recent day when he and a son of his, home for a holiday, brought back forty-two trout, one of which weighed three pounds and four others two pounds each.

There is trout fishing in plenty within easy walking distance, and, should you prefer to try your luck upon the sea, the harbour from which to make the start is not 100 yards away.

Many will go to Roundstone and some will wish to try the pollack, so I must tell of the fisherman who so successfully piloted us to glorious sport with them.

Our host on being told that we desired to try the sea-fishing said, as Mr Shimmer had, 'Pat Jennings is the man for you. I saw him at the fair,' he added, 'so possibly he is in the town still; would you like

to go with me to find him or shall I bring him here?"

After a search in very likely places we found him aboard his boat so near asleep that both 'Jennings' and 'Pat' had to be called loudly before he commenced to stretch himself to consciousness that some one desired speech with him, and that, if his eyes told him true, there might be profit in it.

I have seen animals, wild and tame, rise from their recumbent positions and display their forms with a preliminary stretching of their backs, and the man who rose at last acted in a strikingly similar manner. He was a rough, huge fellow, much past middle age, with shoulders which, in spite of their being slightly bent, seemed capable of carrying great loads, and his legs, parts of which showed through rents, looked little likely to give way, be the burden what it might. His face fitted him. The steel-blue eyes that shone at times from out their heavy covering showed the man had grit to tackle what many would decline. His nose came a long way down and flattened as it came to meet a determined chin that had hanging from it a bristly wisp trimmed one would guess by himself and yet in such a fashion as suited him. He was clad in gray homespun, much worn where most put upon by use, and his boots, to be in keeping with the rest of his outfit, gave freedom to his toes. He wore a hat the brim of which had a slit across it, one edge of which curled up and the other down over his left ear, and there presumably caused such tickling that the battered headgear was gradually pushed to the other side until it almost covered the right eye. This gave a finishing touch to the man's rollicking appearance as he looked and listened to me from his boat.

Had I been called upon to search the harbour and say which of the many boats belonged to Jennings, I think I should have hit upon his four and a half tonner that wanted arms and legs like his to use her oars. She needed a stiffish breeze when under

sail and half a gale to give her a pleasant list. Pat looked quite at home in her, and I thought no man and boat could possibly be more in harmony as each and every detail of both lent themselves to make a rough and ready picture that suggested 'Work, and never mind the weather.' Individual articles, some for domestic use, vied with one another to bring this about, while collectively they told that the captain of-times dined, and sometimes slept, on board. A tar-smudged, iron crock, half filled with dying embers on which potatoes baked, gave forth a pleasant, peaty smell, but, like all else on board, it was the worse for use and stood lopsidedly on two legs, and on that portion of its bottom that had lost the third. So much were man and boat alike that after some days spent with him and her I had to ask if he had made it himself.

Millet was the first to speak. 'Jennings, these gentlemen want you to take them for pollack to-morrow.'

'Shure thin it's meself that will be delighted to do that same and see the jintlemen hauling at the monsters, and it's me gear, and none like it, will hould them.'

Jennings's eyes turned to where a number of stout cord lines, wound upon wooden frames, lay, and then he smilingly remarked:—

'It's fun they'll be giving yer honours if it plaises the weather.'

As we were turning to go I said, 'Have you a gaff, Jennings?'

The answer to this held a reproach as if the speaker thought it was in my mind to doubt his lines.

'Gaff, yer honour? It's no gaff ye'll need.'

We—I say 'we,' as I do not desire to hurt tender feelings—had lost our gaff, and I feared for our chances of replacing it, but I got one that evening which answered splendidly. An obliging man—all Irishmen are that—unscrewed a hook from out the ceiling of his

shop and then, with the aid of a gimlet, got it into the end of a broom handle. I was just a trifle prud as I marched back to that careless son of mine who still persists that it was I who was most responsible for our needing that meat-hook gaff.

Pat Jennings's promise of sport had been given subject to the weather's pleasure, as though he was fearing the change that came and prevented our putting out to sea on either of the two following days. So violent was the wind that we fished the most sheltered lake for trout with the utmost difficulty on the first day and with poor result—nine fish between us; but on the second we found the still high wind had changed a point and aided us to cover spots we could not reach the day before, and we had sport that pleased us much—twenty-two fish, in weight from half a pound to one and three quarter pounds.

The third morning was a glorious one, and soon dispelled all thought of the violence which had preceded it. The sea had but soft, oily waves where before huge, white-crested ones had tumbled and hissed, and the blue haze that capped the distant hills gave assurance that summer was with us yet.

Pat was punctual and we were soon on board, speeding on our way, favoured by a wind that followed.

Pat had a little store of eels for bait which he showed by lifting them and then allowing them to wriggle back through his fingers to the bucket. I gladly accepted this earnest of his desire to do his best, for I have known a professional fisherman happily satisfied when the only provision he has made for sport has been a half-gallon jar of beer.

The satisfaction of our guide in his lines and bait caused me to hesitate to show ours, but they had to come to view, and it was as I feared; Pat looked and listened as a man does when a child displays his toys. Holding the tiller pressed between his arm and side he put the tail of a slaughtered eel upon his hook,

evidently in no way moved from his purpose to have a line out in which he could have some faith.

It would have been easy, but unkind, and most unwise, to have told him that we should not need his lines and lures or his help beyond piloting us to the most likely places. Unkind, because he had told us he had fished for pollack ever since he was old enough to hold his father's lines, and unwise, as men's good temper is the first essential for their best work.

His faith in the eel-tail, which with clumsy, horny fingers he lovingly put on, so filled his huge frame, that I was prompted to suggest a contest giving him the fullest chance to beat my son's rod and line. Pat offered me his line when paid out, but I declined it, saying I preferred to watch him using it, as I wanted to see which would catch more fish, he or my son. While I was saying this Pat gave a hearty jerk, and got a start with a six-pound fish, but he was not allowed to keep it long, as Harry made short work with one of nine, and almost immediately after was playing a heavier fish, the play and landing of which gained a noticing remark from his opponent, 'Shure thin it's tough that fine stuff is.'

He was also pleased to speak kindly of the meat hook that held up the eleven-pound fish while the hook was wrested from its mouth.

'Eleven pounds, Jennings,' and, as he looked round to see me weighing it, he got a tug that pulled his line through loosened fingers and was too late with his strike, but the fish, five pounds, came again and was secured, making the contest level in numbers. After this there was, for some considerable time, no response to either's offerings, and this caused the captain to let out the reef he had taken in, and while doing so, to say, 'I'll be making for Inishlackan, where it will need my lines to hould them.'

The move proved fruitful, and I had cause to fear that the first fish would, with the aid of the weeds

it dashed down amongst, strengthen again Pat's weakening belief that our lines would not last. The rod was bent to a dangerous bow with the fisher's effort, but a turn had to be called for, which the boatman cleverly executed by bringing his boat back over the spot, and to my great relief the fish, in answer to the strain in this opposite direction, cleared the weeds, and then fought gallantly before it rolled upon its side and was brought to gaff.

'It'll be weighing twinty pounds I'd be thinking,' was the staggered Pat's opinion. Its weight was between sixteen and seventeen.

'Shure thin it's meself that has a finer line I'll be for trying.'

He tried a finer line, but as the sun was now high above us, it helped so little that he exclaimed, 'By the powers, it's meself that's disremimbering that the fish won't take the eel in the full light of day. I'll be putting it by until avening. Shall I be trying a red rubber, yer honours?'

He tried one, but it made no difference, so I proposed that I should put a long length of wire next to the bait so that the fish might not see that his glaring line was connected with it. He consented, but not readily, and could he have analysed his feelings he would, I believe, have found a shadowy hope that it would not answer. It did, but still he was at a disadvantage, and did not get half so many fish nor nearly such large ones as Harry got.

Pat, on being asked what drink we should bring for him, had said 'Porter,' so we had brought three bottles with us. His failure to keep up with his opponent made him so thirsty that he opened one of them, popped the fizzing hole into his mouth and nearly choked himself. He sought consolation in a potato from the crock. The tuber burst with little pressure, and the steam that came from it showed it to be very hot, but he managed to eat it, although the

first mouthful caused a tear and had to be held between his teeth and breathed on before he dared swallow it. We saw as little of this as we could : Harry acted as if he had a tug at his line and I was busy watching Harry's movements.

The boatman's thirst and hunger prompted the production of a basket which we found well filled with tasty sundries, a loaf of bread, some cheese and butter, and, while we were satisfying our hunger, the boat held on her way to another of our boatman's favourite spots, of which he spoke in terms that quite excited us.

Illaunacrough is one of a group of rocks well out to sea, some of which are submerged at high water, while others of them are much above the highest Spring tides and provide haunts for numerous seals. We approached close to several huge beasts that were sunning themselves on slabs that sloped to the level of the sea, from which they flopped and dived in the most leisurely manner. Some of them were very curious as to our doings, and popped up so near us as to be able to see the fish upon the gaff, and probably they saw them from underneath upon our lines, but they did not steal nor spoil our sport, so we were pleased to watch them watching us. Harry had some excitement from their proximity, as he really thought when something seized his bait and rushed round the corner of a rock to where the eye could not follow the line's course that our experience at Keem Bay was to be repeated. It was no seal, however, but an ugly black jack pollack, weighing eighteen pounds, and yet not nearly as heavy as it was ugly.

Reader, have you fished for pollack round rocks like these, miles from the mainland, where little fish are kept at bay by larger ones that greedily take what is offered? Had you a tell-tale rod that rejoiced in its work and was your line as fine as you dared to have it? Was your companion one of those most wished

for and your pilot an Irishman with pride of ownership in every fish you caught? Was it a lovely Autumn day like the one I write of? If you can say 'Yes' to this, you will agree with me that such a day of joy is hard to equal and should be remembered with a thankful heart.

The fish we caught round these islands were lost count of, as was the passing of our time until the sun went down and gave thoughts of the journey back. The glories of that Autumn evening, coming to finish with splendour a perfect day spent in happy company on ocean waves that seemed to joy in the pleasure that they gave, brought a chastened spirit, before which the vanity of success was much belittled to make room for humbler thoughts.

We learned from Pat that he came so often to these rocks and stayed so late that the noises of the night which scared his comrades had for him no terrors.

'I'm not denying the fairies, but it's not meself that fears them.'

'But, Jennings, what of the old women's souls that wail within the bodies of the seals at night?'

'Och! old wimen, is it? Faith, it's old wimen that can hear the same whin the creatures are no more than laughing. It's winking at me they were this same day when they see'd yer honours in me boat, and shure it's plaised jintlemen ye are that I am cooking the fish for.'

Until then I had no thought of being hungry, and was but half conscious of Pat's doings, but wher I looked and saw the fish boiling in a saucepan and the steaming potatoes in the crock, and thought of the little way the heavy craft was making against the tide, I was hungry and did justice to the meal provided.

In youthful days I much preferred accompanying my father's men when going journeys that were unknown to me to being at school. I once played truant to go for lime and had some of the man's

bacon, which he cooked on a limestone at the kiln-head. Never, although more than fifty-six years have passed since then, have I eaten bacon that tasted so good as that, and now, after an experience with potatoes just as long, I had to confess that I had never eaten them with such relish nor so longed for more. The pollack, too, had failed to appease my appetite as fish food usually does, and, stranger still, Harry was actually made more hungry by what he had eaten; at least, so he said and looked. I consolingly said, 'It is wise so to eat as to leave some youthlike hunger, rather than to lose all appetite by eating to repletion.'

This set Pat thinking, but he soon came to a conclusion and said, 'It's meself that loses me appetite when I'm full, but I'll be putting on more praties and, by the powers, another fish.'

The stars shone brightly and showed the course through anchored boats as we neared the landing-place, and the form of our host stood boldly out as he waited our coming on the quay.

We were late to bed that night and somewhat late for breakfast next morning, but Pat had been up early and had made sundry journeys with baskets of fish before we saw him. The news of his big take had thus spread, and there were customers waiting for his remaining bargains when we appeared. But day by day the call for pollack was lessened by our catches so much that Pat, when the fourth day's catch was sold, said, 'It's a change the divils are calling for unless I'm to rale give them away with salt thrown in for the curing av thim. Now wouldn't yer honours like to have a thrate wid our big conger? It's rale say-sarpints they be.'

'No, Pat, we cannot stay. We have arranged to be at Carna to-morrow, so you must be here to sail us across the bay to where the Carna road comes to it. There will be a car to meet us there at four o'clock.'

Pat's dear old face fell at this, and, when we mounted the car on the next afternoon and drove away, we left him looking as though he already missed our companionship.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MONGAN'S HOTEL, CARNA—WE FISH WITH ST ANTHONY

WE found Mongan's Hotel, Carna, a very comfortable place, and the host and hostess all anxiety that their guests' stay might be enjoyable. This was demonstrated in many ways; and they were much aided in their efforts by having at their disposal 60,000 acres of shooting, white and brown trout fishing in rivers and lakes, boats to row or sail for sea fishing, the free use of their new yacht *Mayflower*, and, in addition to all this, cars well horsed at a nominal charge per day or hour.

Lack of rain had rather spoilt the fun for trout-fishers here, as it did all over Scotland and Ireland that season. There were four enthusiasts still remaining when we arrived—two ladies and their brothers—who, in spite of their sorry chances, started each morning full of cheery talk of what might or might not happen before the day was done. They were accompanied by their mother, and, as close behind as she could keep, but quite detached, a sister of their mother followed. The sweet simplicity of lengthened spinsterhood had not given this maiden aunt the advantages over her sister, who had borne the troubles of motherhood, that some might have expected. The extreme contrary seemed the case, for she lagged behind on the journey out and on the journey home, in spite of noble efforts at sprinting to catch her sister up. The mother's eyes went from right to left and from

left to right in answer to the cacklings of her handsome brood, so she did not see the ambling trot of the game old soul behind. I wondered, I could not help it, if the dear old lady had much to leave or was dependent on those in front. The fishers' captures were not numerous, but sufficient for all to have trout for dinner each day and to set tongues wagging that told much of how the day had been spent. The delay of the aunt in coming to these meals caused me to wonder more than once if she had been left upon the road, and, from exhaustion, had fallen into a ditch whence, like the claret-loving college don who fell between the graves in a church-yard, she was unable to get up and, like him, had folded her hands upon her breast and said, resignedly, 'I suppose I shall rise with the rest.' I was so worried by such thoughts that when she did appear I felt vexed with her for having made me anxious, and I understood why a mother beats the child who has narrowly escaped some peril of the street.

It is pleasant to wake with brain refreshed and body willing to undertake the tasks that have been planned beforehand, as then there is no worrying thought of probable vexatious waste of time. First hours were thought so much of in my youth, and have given me so much better service in life than later ones, that I think a day ill spent the first half of which has not called forth an effort that deserved approval. So it was overnight I made arrangements for a boat and two men to go for pollack. This was fortunate, for the landlord would have assigned to us but one, as the fish are plentiful very near home. My chart had shown me that the bay was shallow, so, while I was in no way doubting that fish were numerous, my experience told me they would be lacking much in size. Our host did not like my suggestion that the fish must be small, and said, 'No! gentlemen frequently bring home large ones, four and sometimes

five pounds in weight.' This settled the point, and I decided to have two men and a chance to reach grounds where we might hope for heavier fish.

One of the men was waiting for us next morning to carry what we desired to take with us and to show the way to the boat. He was a sandy-haired, ruddy-faced man, in the prime of life, and a picture of strength as he strode towards us with a Scottish gillie's gait. He appeared very Scottish, yet there was something wanting in the face and something there not to be expected, and I wondered what it was until he spoke, when I knew that Scottish solemn readiness for seriousness was absent and Irish preparedness for mirth much in evidence. This was Mike.

Now for Anthony, known as Tony, our second boatman. I sometimes fancy that it would be better if I was not so quick to see things out of line, a petticoat too long, a coat collar high, horses badly paired for work, and other animals not doing well in double harness; but then there's the fun to balance this which I could not do without; it is so good to laugh, be it never so quietly. Being thus observant, I have often had to say, 'Well! I never,' and, 'Did you ever?' and now I have to say I never saw a pair of rowers so opposite in every way as manned the boat we fished from at Carna.

Anthony was hauling at a rope with his back towards us when I saw him first, and, thinking he was a thin slip of a boy, I asked Mike where his mate was, and got reply, 'That's Tony, sorr, hoisting the sail.'

I looked forward again, and then at the speaker, and I could see in fancy this strong man rowing circles round the oar worked by the boy, whose outline from where we walked was little thicker than a chalked line with an O upon it. I suppose I was looking grieved over my mislaid plans, for Harry glanced at me and then dropped behind to laugh. It was not until I saw this strange figure's face and heard its voice that

I discovered that, after all, Anthony was a man, or as near to one as he could ever hope to be again. I had thought Noah's 950 years a clerical error and his not getting married until he was 500 a mistake until I saw Anthony's face, which 1000 years could not account for, as there would still be left a look as if the spirit had quitted it more than once to return again, after failing to discover another such saintly habitation.

The sail he hoisted proved useless, as the little wind there had been died away before we started, and so the oars were put out, and, to my surprise, Tony's automaton figure was seated just in front of me to row the stroke while the man of flesh and blood took the easy bow. I could only guess how little flesh still remained to aid Tony to sit in comfort by what was left upon his arms and legs, as shown by the way their coverings hung. There appeared to be so little flesh upon his bones that I thought he might, if the occasion came, say, as a thin patient did when a mustard plaster was being put on: 'It's very little meat for so much mustard, doctor.'

The facial features of this much-shrunken man were overhung by a cumbrous crown that belittled every item except the chin, which stretched to a lengthy point and was adorned with a goat-like beard that time had whitened, and a further time had added a yellow tinge to what was white before. This beard was much in evidence, for it made a journey from its wearer's right shoulder to his left each time he bent forward to take a stroke, and when he pulled the beard made the journey back; and so it went, to and fro, with the regularity of a pendulum.

After my faith in fairies went (my love for the memory of the one who told me of them will never go) spirits rapped and tables turned in vain, and the ghosts I have seen since then have not alarmed me or even made me curious, but Tony showed quite plainly that when the spirit was willing it needed

but little to make things move in merry fashion. To see him row was a revelation, and his management of the boat when under sail was astounding. He would at times fairly fling himself to get a hold of the rope next the pulley that was up and out from him until all that was left of Tony in the boat was his legs below the knees. Several times when thus extended a freshening puff fairly stretched him, and, fearing he would go, I held his trousers legs until he was on board again. He is a fisher, one of the best I ever fished with. It seemed that his experience left nothing unknown to him in this direction. Even our fine lines brought no expression of surprise, but merely a look of pleased recognition as of one who had long since known their merits and was glad to see something old-fashioned reappear. 'A white worm on one av thim, plaise' carried conviction by its tone, and what resulted proved there was wisdom in his choice. He knew, too, the depths to which our lines would sink, and asked for their raising and their dropping as the fishing ground demanded. I might have left my chart at home, nor did I need to make much call upon my own experience as, when with Tony, I was learning. His familiar knowledge of the haunts and habits of the fish prompted me to remember and to tell him of his sainted namesake, and how he, in the intervals of the devil's harassing temptations, went to the sea to give to the fishes the sermons to which the heathen would not listen, and so influenced them that they moved, and even bowed, at his bidding. 'Thin it's a powerful pracher he was, and the saints themselves best know how he came to be named afther me. Ach the praching !'

He said this so sorrowfully that I was compelled to fear that he had been made to listen to preaching in his youth when he would have preferred to have been elsewhere. I had some sympathy for this, as it caused me to remember the lengthy sermons I in

no way understood and the much-offered box for the coin I had spent in toffee. But Mike was interested in St Anthony, and desired to know if his riverence wore bathing drawers, and 'would he kape a fish that got inside them?'

I am not easily discouraged, and I so longed to make the ancient face put on a smile that I really should be pardoned for having tried just once more. I was moved to my choice by the beard that pendulated before me. I took the precaution to ask if he had ever heard of the Jew who wagered a hair from his beard with a hairy-faced Irishman against one of his that he could name more saints than the Irishman could, a hair to be pulled for each saint.

'There's nothing new, sorr, the world is too old, but tell it, for Mike would bite his nose off, and no danger to it, to hear a joke that's new.'

So I went on with the tale and told them how, when single hairs in numbers had been extracted, the Jew demanded and took a dozen for the twelve apostles. The painful loss of these sharpened the Irishman's wits as to the advantages of disposing of his saints wholesale, so he replied,—

'Thin be jabers I'll give ye the Royal Irish Fusiliers, every one av them a saint, and clear yer chin, ye divil.'

It was Mike that laughed; Tony had heard it once too often. The day was waning before I saw him smile, and, as will happen with many folk, it was at no tale told by others but at what he said himself.

'I am afraid tales worry you, Tony, and that you prefer more attention to the fishing.'

'Not at all, yer honour; it's meself that's niver toired of listening, and it's sorrow I have that jingle-men's tales get here before them.'

There was roguery in this, for Mike laughed loudly, and Tony's face relaxed, while Harry, thinking it 'a hit' or to encourage Tony to further speech, laughed and said, 'Hear! Hear!'

'Mike,' said Tony, 'will spread his mouth as often as ye plaise if ye'll laugh yerself at what ye say. Shure an it's ivery jintleman that would be telling tales when the say is silent and the fish don't bite his bait. I clean disremimbers where the jintleman was for coming from that tould us that this was the best of all the worlds. Was ye for remimbering, Mike?'

'I was forgitting, too,' said Mike, 'but it was "ye sinner" he called ye when he gave ye the whisky.'

'Be aisy, Mike, it was meself that said to him, "Shure thin it's a greater traveller than meself ye are, sorr."

'"Well, I guess I've travelled some," said he.

'"And are the worlds much aloike, sorr, and are there any ye haven't yet seen?" said I.

'It was thin he handed me his flask, saying,—

'"Liquor, ye sinner?"'

'Thru for ye,' said Mike, 'and wasn't it meself had no taste of the same?'

It is difficult to decide under which of the varying conditions of the different days we fished at Carna our captain shone the most. I admired his easy and regular stroke that gave the boat a movement that suited the fish until they had mouthed the lure, and equally effective was the instantaneous and momentarily increased speed that securely hooked the quarry. I think—I say 'I think'—he was most like himself and most to be admired when the waves ran high and, with daring skill, he sailed the boat scarily near foam-capped rocks, sheering her off in the nick of time, and bringing tugging fish from the seething waters which we fishers had to play while crossing waves that tossed and bumped us on and off our seats in the funniest fashion.

From experience I have gathered that boatmen inured to chopping seas like to test the endurance of a landsman, and that should he stand the ordeal

without distress or murmur they are almost prepared to treat him as an equal. If Tony's display of sailing skill in half a gale amongst tumbling waters was prompted by this desire he did it so thoroughly as to prove that there would be some danger to himself before the fishers would see anything but what was comic in holding fish while being tossed from seat to floor. Harry tumbled and gathered himself into a kneeling posture, and from that fell over on his side, while holding as firmly as he dared to a pollack that whirred the handle of his winch so near his lips that his laughter and the wheel's noise were blended. I could not help him as I was busy with a determined fish, but, as a father should, I offered him sound advice, 'Hold to him from where you are until I get this one in.'

Then there were hours of soft, warm breezes for easy sailing, when the pleasure of successful fishing was in every detail of each capture. Tony, the venturesome, ventured then to places between rocks where a bigger fish than we had caught might have a home; perhaps the big one was there that is never caught although so often hooked. It is just as well the monster has not yet been captured, as we can still search the seas for him with the certain knowledge that he takes the angler's lures most readily and, when a mighty tug comes and the wheel screams out for help, we can wonder if we have him on. A fisher friend of mine had the monster salmon on, there can be no doubt, for this is the impression his tale of it made on me. It rushed, tugged, jiggled, and sulked in turns as no fish had ever done before, and after playing his would-be capturer for an hour and a half, and tiring him until he could not lift his cramped arms, it snapped the trace and severed its connection with the used-up man, but, that it might not quite forget him, it kept his fly.

'It was a monster, Geen, and had you been there and gaffed it for me you would have slapped my back.'

and said, "Lay thee down and dee, Johnson; lay thee down and dee."

There are exceptions to every rule, and even Tony's turn came to be surprised. The sun had set hastily behind a cloud that presently rose and darkened the high and oily running waves, and thinking to entice a fish or two on the journey home, I took off the worm and replaced it with a Silver Natural Spin, and then held it in the water so that Tony could see its frightened-fish-like spin. Wonderful to relate, he asked to have it in his hand, where he turned it over many times while he seemingly racked his brain in vain for memories of its counterpart. He dropped it in the water and watched it spin again until the freeing of the winch gave line, and even after that he watched the place where he thought the lure was spinning. Still cogitating, his eyes came to the rod as if he momentarily expected it to bend, and that he might know quickly the size of the coming fish, he bent his ear to catch what the winch would say. His expectant attitude worked on me until I found myself gripping my little rod as if I feared its loss, and, when a tug came, I gave such a vigorous strike as would have broken it had I not been so holding the line, as is my habit, that it might slip through my fingers at such a pull. A fish struck as this one had been could have no doubt about its being attached to trouble, and he commenced at once in the wildest way to try to free himself, and a grand fight he made to do it, but his first great rush that found me less capable through having acted so foolishly failed, and after that his chances lessened with each run until, out of breath, he came with a roll and a flopping of his tail to be gaffed. Tony unhooked the fish, the largest we caught while with him, and then availed himself of the opportunity of inspecting the bait again, and, while tickling his crown, he gave a smile that said 'Of course,' and then there was another smile and a smacking of his

knee at the thought that his memory could still go back to a period so remote for proof of his belief that there is nothing new.

The flashing bait attracted the pollack that quickly darkening evening, as it had on many another such occasion, while the rubber worm became discredited and was removed to give place to another flasher, and then both rods were busy and we thought to fill the boat. When Dame Fortune comes with her lap full of good things and gives with both hands it is easy to be unmindful of the probability that her stay will be brief. The big dark cloud brought with it, from out the west, wind that freshened and drove us to harbour. Mike, on landing, started for a means of getting the fish to the hotel, and came back with—the truth must be told—a donkey and cart. The smallest fish weighed six pounds, the next in weight eight pounds, and then upwards to fifteen pounds—thirty-eight fish in all.

The wind that drove us so hastily to shelter continued, and prevented our getting to sea next day, although we made attempts that took much time. The lulls that caused us to try again and again were of short duration, and the only reward for our perseverance was the consciousness of having done our best. We got well splashed, but there is nothing so good for the hair as salt water nor anything so immediate in its effects, for you can feel the thin place thicken as the salt dries on it, and, if you are gentle with your rubbing and let the sea breeze do its share, you will be delighted with the seeming growth.

Blank days are not to be despised because they do not lend themselves to be talked of, nor is their lowering of our pride very harmful, and to their credit we must surely place something for the energy with which we strive again, and something for the extra pleasure we shall have in our next success. I have striven without succeeding as frequently as

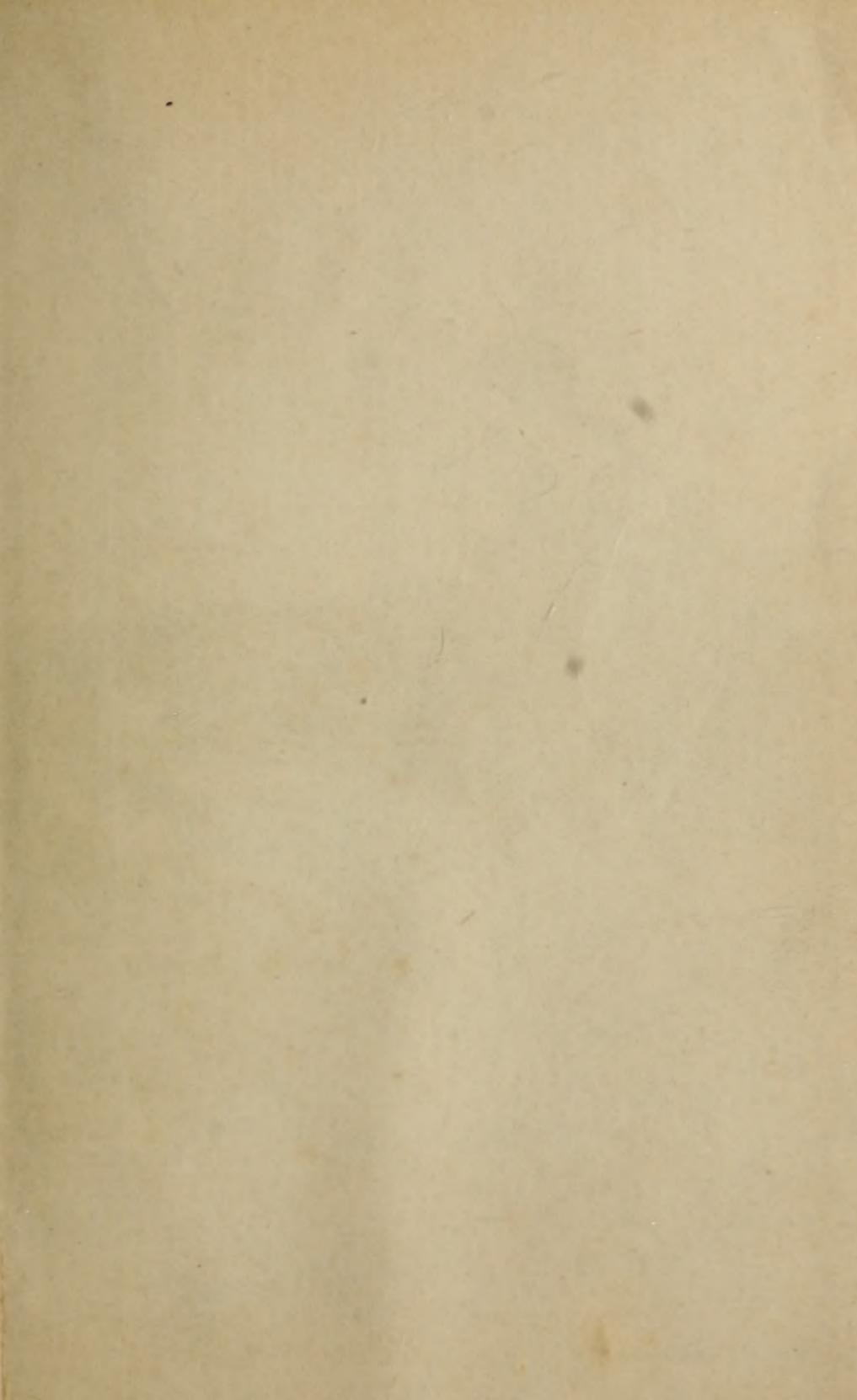
most, and have often felt glad when the day was drawing to its close that the evening meal did not depend upon what I was carrying home.

Harry's holiday was far too brief, and the time for our return, coming as it did while the weather was still summer-like and the sport at sea good, came much too soon. Regretfully we said good-bye to pleasant acquaintances, to our host and hostess, and to Mike and Tony, all of whom had helped to our enjoyment.

They were happy days, and happy have been those spent with men who, as tired as myself of ordered life, have made a break in it. September friends I have who love to see partridges on the wing and upon their plates on the first of that good month, and November friends who say that to shoot a pheasant coming with the wind, and swerving here and there to avoid the branches of the taller trees, is by far the grandest sport of all. To wear gaiters and carry a gun is excuse sufficient for a surgeon I have often shot with. He seldom fires, and, when he does, it is generally just to give an echo to his chum Tom Wilson's gun.

A clergyman, whose duty it is ever to be reading the burial service, sometimes comes fishing with me, bringing with him the echoes of his calling. It is good to see him seated on a stool, half hidden amongst sedge and rush, fishing a baited swim, for when the fish commence to bite I notice by the happy twinkle in his eyes and by his joyous talk that the saintly parson has gone and my companion is a mere joyous man.

We are all children's children of nomad fathers with somewhere in our hearts a longing to tread the turf. That longing has ever been with me. I feel out of place in crowds, and the rush, tumult, and anxiety of a city life is a battle I have had to take a part in much against my will, but, thanks to days stolen for sport, I have come through smiling.







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